

Report from the Quality Assessment Committee

Issue

1. The board is kept informed of the work of its Quality Assessment Committee (QAC) by receiving a report on the outcomes of each meeting. The attached report summarises the outcomes of the QAC meeting held on 22 May 2019. This report will be supplemented by an oral report given by the chair of the committee.

Recommendations

2. The board is invited to receive the report of the Quality Assessment Committee.
3. The board is invited to agree that, on the basis of advice from the QAC, the OfS should consult on proposed changes to the regulatory framework as set out in paragraphs 6-8 of this paper.
4. The board is invited to note the annual report of the designated quality body (DQB) at Annex A, which the DQB is required to produce under paragraph 8 of schedule 4 of HERA.
5. The board is invited to note the finalised key performance measures for the DQB at Annex B.

Further information

6. Available from Simon Levine.

Quality Assessment Committee report

May 2019

Outcomes of initial registration for the quality and standards conditions

1. The committee received a paper providing an early account of the outcomes of the registration process in relation to the quality and standards conditions. It was noted that the majority of post-registration mitigation on these conditions was through the imposition of enhanced monitoring requirements and that condition B3 (relating to student outcomes) had resulted in the largest volume of post-registration mitigation. Members noted that this extensive regulatory activity would not be publicly visible as enhanced monitoring requirements were not currently published.
2. It was agreed a further update would come to the committee when work had been completed on the development of the OfS's approach to condition B3. The committee would also find it helpful to review the outcomes of the first batch of decisions that had been based on a Quality and Standards Review by the designated quality body.

Degree awarding powers

3. The committee received a paper on the OfS's powers to authorise, vary or revoke degree awarding powers.

Degree standards and grade inflation

4. The committee received a paper which set out the OfS's current work on regulating degree standards. Members noted regulatory activity at the level of individual providers, through some of the B conditions, and at sector-level including through engagement with the work of the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment (UKSCQA).
5. The QAC noted that the OfS intends to publish annually an analysis of degree classifications showing trends over time at both sector- and provider-level. The next data release was scheduled for July 2019. Where the data suggested that a provider had demonstrated an unexplained increase in the number of firsts and 2:1s, the OfS would seek an explanation from the provider and consider further action where the explanation was considered unsatisfactory.
6. The Committee noted that the UKSCQA was to be invited to agree to recognise a set of standards for degree classifications for undergraduate degrees on the basis of the provisions of section 13 of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 (HERA). This was a necessary step to allow the OfS to adopt such 'sector recognised standards' within the regulatory framework and to use them for regulatory purposes. The UKSCQA's decision would be informed by a sector-wide consultation conducted by UUK, GuildHE and the QAA.
7. The QAC agreed that it would be important for the OfS to adopt the new sector recognised standards and to use these for regulatory purposes. This would allow the

OfS to ask the DQB to assess the standards of classified degrees in providers where the OfS required evidence to confirm that the B conditions were satisfied.

Update following the meeting of the UKSCQA held on 6 June 2019

8. The UKSCQA agreed at its meeting on 6 June 2019 that the description of academic standards for classified degrees should be adopted as sector-recognised standards for the purposes of section 13 of HERA.

On the basis of QAC's advice, the board is invited to agree that the OfS should consult under section 75 of HERA about amending the regulatory framework to include these standards.

Annual report from the designated quality body

9. The QAC received the annual report of the DQB required under paragraph 8 of schedule 4 of HERA, noting that appropriate changes had been made in response to the committee's comments on an earlier draft.

KMPs for the designated quality body

10. The committee received a paper which set out the final version of the KPMs that had been subject to discussion between the OfS and the DQB. It was noted that minor amendments had been made since the last meeting which have been agreed by both organisations. The committee agreed the KPMs, noting that they would need to be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that they remained fit for purpose.
11. The KPMs have been included as Annex B to this paper.

Reporting and milestones of the designated quality body

12. The committee received a paper providing an update on the recent activities of the DQB.

Future committee meetings

13. The next meeting will take place on 12 September 2019.