

Annex A

Task Group on Information relating to Quality and Standards in Higher Education

Membership

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Terms of reference

1. The Task Group is asked to review, and prepare a report setting out recommendations on, the following:
 - a. The information about the quality and standards of teaching and learning which all higher education institutions (HEIs) should be expected, as a matter of standard good practice, to collect and have available within the institution for the purposes of setting, developing and monitoring quality and standards.
 - b. Which elements of that information should be published by all HEIs.
 - c. What definitions should apply to secure consistency between institutions in assembling the information at sub-paragraphs a and b.
 - d. What formats should apply in publishing the information at sub-paragraph b.
 - e. The frequency of publication.
2. 'Information' includes data, performance indicators, reports and judgements, in whatever combination the Task Group judges appropriate.
3. In preparing its recommendations, the Task Group should have particular regard to the importance of avoiding unnecessary burdens on HEIs in relation to the collection, analysis and publication of information; while still securing that sufficient information is published in a consistent, accessible and robust form, to meet the needs of students, employers and other stakeholders.
4. The Task Group should aim to complete its work by the end of December 2001. In order to secure understanding and endorsement of its proposals, it may wish to consider publishing interim proposals for consultation. The final report should be submitted jointly to the HEFCE, Universities UK, SCOP and the QAA, who will together consider its recommendations.
5. In carrying out its work, the Task Group should keep in close touch with discussions which the QAA will be leading to work out in detail the implementation of the proposed approach to institution-wide audit.

Annex B

Information requirements for quality and standards in HE: summary of existing evidence

1. As background to inform their work, the Task Group considered the main findings from previous studies about the information requirements of students and external stakeholders relating to quality and standards.
2. Three key reports provide evidence of the information which students and other stakeholders use, and would like to have:
 - a. 'Providing public information on the quality and standards of higher education courses', a report by Segal Quince Wicksteed (SQW) to the four funding bodies and the QAA. This was published by the HEFCE in November 1999 (HEFCE 99/61).
 - b. 'Making the right choice: how students choose universities and colleges', a report by the Institute of Employment Studies to the CVCP, HEFCE and UCAS, published by the CVCP in June 1999.
 - c. 'Rebranding British education: research study conducted for the British Council', a report by MORI Social Research published in August 1999.

Summary

3. Different types of applicants to higher education use different information and are influenced by their peers in different ways. In particular, mature students rely more on friends and guidance services and less on publications than do school leavers. Key influences on the choice of HEI are varied. Among the most important are the course, the grades required for entry in relation to expected grades, location, and links between school/college and HEI. Although employment prospects, entry grades, and quality of teaching and facilities all played an important role in the choice of HEI, none of these factors was the critical influence.
4. The most important factor influencing overseas undergraduate students is the country of study and not the institution. For postgraduate overseas students, choice of institution, in particular the reputation of the institution, is more important. Factors influencing country choice are mainly financial: the cost of living in the UK; the ease with which one can obtain work during the course; and the prospects for staying on in the UK after the course is completed.
5. Recruiters are most interested in the personal qualities of the individual graduate. Information on teaching quality and standards of attainment is secondary. Those employers recruiting for specialist skills target particular HEIs for recruitment purposes. The key factors determining which are targeted are the track record within the company of graduates from the HEI, the reputation of the HEI among colleagues, and the relevance of the course to the employer's needs. Specific information about the quality of teaching is a criterion used by 5 per cent of employers in their targeting. In terms of sources of information on quality and standards, colleagues are a major source. League tables in newspapers are also important. The majority of employers surveyed were unaware that information on teaching quality was available. Most of those surveyed said that if they had been aware, they would have consulted it.

Selection process undertaken by applicants to HEIs

6. Before examining the published information on quality and standards which applicants to higher education wish to access, it is useful to consider the evidence on the selection process undertaken by applicants. For the majority of 'school leaver applicants' the selection process contains six key steps:
 - a. Definition of the subject to be studied. This decision is reached in a variety of ways based on interest in the subject, and advice from the school, family and friends. External

literature or information does not appear to have a strong influence on this first stage of the process.

b. Development of a 'long list' of HEIs. The development of a long list appears to be based not so much on rigorous research but on more subjective input from key influences, and the reputation and location of the HEI.

c. Narrowing down of options based on course selection. The availability of the selected course reduced the list further. HEI prospectuses are the main sources of information at this point, together with input from careers advisers on whether the HEI would be appropriate for the applicant. The narrowing down process takes into account factors such as the location, culture and character of the HEI (for example, small or large, in town or campus).

d. Reduction of options through matching course grade requirements and predicted grades. Guides such as the Push Guide and Heap's Degree Course Offers are the main sources of information accessed by students at this point, as well as information provided directly by the HEI. Minimum entry grades are used by many as a proxy for the quality and standards of the course.

e. Development of an application 'short list'. At this point detailed investigation takes place into a whole range of issues, including teaching quality, curriculum content, and a range of issues not related to quality and standards.

f. Final selection of the HEIs which would be acceptable to the applicant. Applicants apply to up to six HEIs when going through UCAS, but appear seriously to consider only two or three. If there is a choice to be made, it is often based on a visit to the HEI at an open day or interview.

7. There is a major difference in selection behaviour by 'mature applicants' (those over 25). They seriously consider fewer HEIs than school leaver applicants (between one and three). Mature students are often constrained by commitments which reduce their choice to the one or two local HEIs. Choice of HEI is often less important than with school leavers, and gaining a place at any HEI is often the primary objective. The availability of a place at a targeted HEI is the key issue, and choice of subject and course is less significant in determining selection.

Key influences in deciding on preferred institution

Undergraduate students

8. Key influences on the choice of HEI are varied. Among the most important are:

- the course or combination of modules offered
- the grades required for entry in relation to expected grades
- cost of living
- location
- links between school/college and HEI
- methods of assessment and examination
- quality of teaching and facilities
- employment prospects after graduation
- general reputation of the HEI.

9. The course or combination of modules was the most important factor influencing the choice of HEI. The reputation of the institution was also influential. Definitions of reputation included the public profile of the HEI, the perceived employability of graduates, the track record an HEI has for a certain subject, the 'name' the HEI has on the basis of its performance (RAE results, quality assessments, degree results, league tables and so on), and whether the HEI is old or new.

10. Location ranks alongside reputation as one of the most important factors to influence choice. Applicants to HEIs have strong feelings about either wanting to get away from home or wanting to stay close to home. A considerable number were also constrained by having to stay at home for financial reasons. Employment prospects, entry grades and quality of teaching and facilities all played an important role in the choice of HEI, but none of these factors was the critical influence. When asked to identify any factor which influenced choice, the quality of teaching and of facilities were rated as important by two-thirds of applicants. Quality of teaching as the single most important factor influencing choice of HEI appeared low on the ranking – 6 per cent of the sample – although a much higher proportion said it was a factor.

11. The above comments need to be interpreted within a general context of awareness of information on quality and standards. The SQW report found that only 50 per cent of respondents were aware of the existence of such information from all sources, including QAA reports. Only 12 per cent of those surveyed considered QAA reports in their current format to be the single most important source of information about quality. About two-thirds of those who were aware of them actually used the information.

12. Applicants stated they would be most interested in information about their intended course. Applicants were least interested in information about the entire institution. However, differences exist between groups of applicants with respect to quality and standards information. Those predicted to achieve higher grades tend to be more aware of all sources of information and more likely to consider it than those with lower expectations. Mature students are also less aware. The greater use by those expecting higher grades may reflect in part the wider options available to them, while others, especially mature students, are often restricted in their options.

13. Information on teaching content and method, and how the course is assessed, was the most frequently requested aspect of quality and standards information. 'What the HEI is seeking to equip graduates to do' and 'how well the course is taught' were also requested. Quality of teaching scored lowest when applicants were asked which single type of information they would find most valuable.

Overseas students

14. One additional source of evidence here is the report, 'The postgraduate student from the Indian sub-continent: choice factors, perceptions and influences of Indian sub-continent students who are studying overseas' by EduWorld, published in June 2001.

15. The most important factor influencing potential overseas students is the country of study. Country comes before institution in the decision making process, although institution choice is much more important at postgraduate level. Three key factors are seen to be important in country choice, but in which the UK is felt to be weak, and all three are linked to financial issues:

- the cost of living
- the ease of working during the course
- the ease of staying on to work in the country after the course.

16. Immigration and visa issues were seen as a major concern. Family ties are also an important influence in making the original country decision: the US has an advantage in terms of the Far East market, while Britain has an advantage in terms of the Indian sub-continent.

17. The UK is seen to be strong for most educational factors – internationally recognised qualifications, diversity of courses, academic track record, academic integrity, quality, employability, internationalism of student bodies, and shorter degrees. But scholarships (or lack of them) are the one issue to stand out as a weakness. A number of other areas were cited for improvement, most of which were related to two factors:

- finance, where costs have been exacerbated by the Far Eastern economic downturn, exchange rates and aggressive marketing by other countries
- criticisms of bureaucracy and slowness in the UK's admissions processes.

18. Student welfare and accommodation also come in for criticism. Overall, while the US is not perceived to be any better than the UK in terms of quality (with the possible exception of postgraduates), it is felt to offer advantages in terms of scholarships, customer care and the admissions/recruitment process, which are all factors influencing decisions.

19. Postgraduate students study overseas for a variety of reasons, the most important being to obtain a better quality education (36 per cent). Other frequently mentioned reasons were:

- to broaden their experience (26 per cent)
- to improve career prospects (25 per cent)
- because they think overseas qualifications are more highly respected/have a better reputation (24 per cent)
- because the particular course/subject they wanted to study is not offered in their own country (23 per cent).

20. When thinking of overseas postgraduate study, students tend first to choose a preferred course or a preferred country in which to study. Decisions are taken on these factors before choosing an institution or city. Students tend to study in the UK because it offers the course they wanted. They also tend to choose the UK because they believe qualifications will be more highly respected.

21. The most important single factor for overseas students when selecting a university for postgraduate study is the reputation of the university/quality of education. Nearly two-thirds of all students considered this as their most important selection factor. The other important factor in selecting a university for international study is the content of the course. Students also tend to be conscious of tuition costs and living expenses.

22. Students obtain information to help decide upon an overseas university from a wide range of sources. The internet is the most frequently used information source, followed by university course guides and word of mouth via friends. The British Council is by far the most popular information source for the UK.

Employers (recruiters)

23. Some analogies exist between the decision making processes followed by graduate recruiters and student applicants to higher education, but there are also major differences. Employers seeking to recruit graduates are primarily interested in personal qualities. Other dimensions of the programme, such as quality of teaching and standards of attainment, are used to judge the suitability of an applicant for a position.

24. Those graduate recruiters interviewed (86 employers responded to a postal survey, and a further 20 employers and professional bodies around the UK provided face-to-face input) made the point that there are wider considerations that influence the selection process, namely:

- a. For some of the largest organisations, especially in the public sector, a wish to be seen to be open and transparent in recruitment. There is a concern that using assessments of

quality and standards to influence recruitment might be perceived as unfairly excluding potential recruits with appropriate qualifications.

b. Jobs are not necessarily restricted to graduates.

25. Only 19 per cent of respondents stated that perceptions of course quality had a major influence on the assessment of applicants; 51 per cent said it had a minor influence, and 31 per cent no influence. There was little difference between employers of different sizes, although a higher proportion of those employing between 250 and 1000 staff stated that quality perceptions had a minor rather than a major influence. There was little difference between employers according to the number of graduates they recruited. As might be expected, a slightly higher proportion of those employers recruiting solely for specialist skills stated that quality perceptions had some influence.

26. As part of the study, employers were asked to identify the three most important factors that determined which HEIs to target. Only a very small number of respondents considered teaching quality an important factor in this decision. Previous experience of an HEI's graduates within the organisation is the major factor, especially with regard to generic skills but also for specialist skills. Reputation among colleagues was the next most important in terms of specialist skills, though less important for generic skills. As would be expected, course relevance is also important in relation to specialist skills, as are existing links such as research sponsorship and funding of professorships or chairs in a particular subject. These links also reflect close HEI-business relationships, where the employer has a good knowledge of practices within departments/faculties.

27. Most employers were unaware that information on teaching quality is available. Most said that if they had been aware they would have consulted it. Employers' requirements are for information on course content, followed by benchmarking, especially in relation to standards, and comparison of courses.

Annex C

Summary of recommendations for information on quality and standards

Part A: Information which should be available in all HEIs

1. Institutional context:
 - a. Mission statement.
 - b. Relevant sections of the HEI's corporate plan.
 - c. Statement of quality assurance policies and processes.
 - d. Learning and teaching strategy and periodic reviews of progress.
2. Student admission, progression and completion:
 - a. Student qualifications on entry.
 - b. Range of entrants classified by age, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic background, disability and geographical origin as returned to HESA.
 - c. Progression and retention data for each year of each course/programme, differentiating between failure and withdrawal.
 - d. Data on completion.
 - e. Data on qualifications awarded.
 - f. Data on employment/training outcomes from the First Destination Survey.
3. Assurance of academic quality and standards:
 - a. Programme approval, monitoring and review:
 - Programme specifications.
 - A statement of the respective roles, responsibilities and authority of different bodies within the HEI involved in programme approval and review.
 - Key outcomes of programme approval, and annual monitoring and review processes.
 - Periodic internal reports of major programme reviews (normally undertaken every five years or so).
 - Reports of periodic internal reviews by departments or faculties.
 - Accreditation and monitoring reports by professional or statutory bodies.
 - b. Assessment:
 - Assessment strategies, processes and procedures.
 - The range and nature of student work.

- External examiners' reports, analysis of their findings, and the actions taken in response.
 - Reports of periodic reviews of the appropriateness of assessment methods used.
- c. Student satisfaction, covering the views of students on:
- Arrangements for academic and tutorial guidance, support and supervision.
 - Library services and IT support.
 - Suitability of accommodation, equipment and facilities for teaching and learning.
 - Perceptions of the quality of teaching and the range of teaching and learning methods.
 - Assessment arrangements.
 - Relevance of the course to further study and prospective employment.
 - Quality of pastoral support.
- d. Evidence available to teams undertaking HEIs' own internal reviews of quality and standards:
- The effectiveness of teaching and learning, in relation to programme aims and curriculum content as they evolve over time.
 - The range of teaching methods used.
 - The availability and use of specialist equipment and other resources and materials to support teaching and learning.
 - Staff access to professional development to improve teaching performance, including peer observation and mentoring programmes.
 - The use of external benchmarking and other comparators both at home and overseas.
 - The involvement of external peers in the review method, their observations, and the action taken in response.

Part B: Information for publication

4. Quantitative data:
- a. HESA data on student entry qualifications (including A-levels, access courses, vocational qualifications, and Scottish Highers).
 - b. Performance indicators and benchmarks published by the HE funding bodies on progression and successful completion for full-time first degree students (separately for progression after the first year, and for all years of the programme).
 - c. HESA data on class of first degree, by subject area.
 - d. Performance indicators and benchmarks published by the HE funding bodies on first destinations/employment outcomes for full-time first degree students.

5. Qualitative data:
- a. Summaries of external examiners' reports on each programme.
 - b. A voluntary commentary by the HEI at whole institution level on the findings of external examiners' reports.
 - c. Student feedback, disaggregated by institution, collected through an extended First Destination Survey.
 - d. Student feedback collected through HEIs' own surveys, undertaken on a more consistent basis.
 - e. A summary statement of the institution's learning and teaching strategy as presented to the HEFCE under the Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund programme. The statement would be published to coincide with the agreed cycle for institutional audit.
 - f. Summary statements of the results of, and the actions taken in response to, internal annual programme monitoring and periodic programme reviews, published in association with programme specifications for each programme.
 - g. Summaries of employer links, included in items e and f above; and outcomes of periodic national surveys of employer opinion to ascertain the effectiveness of programmes in preparing students for employment.

Annex D

Current subject area classification systems

As noted in paragraphs 21 - 24, the Task Group considered a number of systems for grouping subjects. The main ones currently in use in relation to teaching activities are:

- The 42 subject areas used by the QAA for subject-level review.
- The 24 subject groupings used for the LTSN subject centre network.
- The 19 JACS groupings.

These three classification systems are set out below.

	LTSN Subject Centre Title	Associated Subject Disciplines (QAA Standard Subject Units)
1	Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary Medicine	QAA 01: Medicine QAA 02: Dentistry QAA 03: Veterinary Medicine
2	Bioscience	QAA 04: Biosciences QAA 15: Agriculture, Forestry, Agricultural and Food Sciences
3	Health Sciences and Practice	QAA 05: Nursing and Midwifery QAA 06: Subjects Allied to Medicine
4	Social Policy and Social Work	QAA 07: Social Policy and Administration and Social Work
5	Sociology, Anthropology and Politics	QAA 08: Sociology and Anthropology QAA 24: Politics
6	Physical Sciences	QAA 09: Physics and Astronomy QAA 10: Chemistry
7	Engineering	QAA 11: Engineering
8	Psychology	QAA 12: Psychology
9	Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences	QAA 13: Geography QAA 14: Earth and Environmental Sciences
10	Materials	QAA 16: Materials
11	Built Environment	QAA 17: Architecture QAA 18: Building and Surveying QAA 19: Town and Country Planning and Landscape
12	Mathematics, Statistics and Operational Research	QAA 20: Mathematics, Statistics and Operational Research
13	Information and Computer Sciences	QAA 21: Computer Science QAA 22: Librarianship and Information Studies
14	Economics	QAA 23: Economics
15	Law	QAA 25: Law

16	Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies	QAA 26: Linguistics QAA 28: Area Studies QAA 29: Language and Related Studies
17	English	QAA 27: English
18	History, Classics and Archaeology	QAA 30: Classical Languages and Ancient History QAA 31: History QAA 32: Archaeology
19	Philosophical and Religious Studies	QAA 33: Philosophy QAA 34: Theology and Religious Studies
20	Art, Design and Communication	QAA 35: Communication, Media, Film and Television Studies QAA 36: Art and Design
21	Performing Arts	QAA 37: Drama, Dance and Performing Arts QAA 38: Music
22	Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism	QAA 39: Hospitality, Leisure, Recreation, Sports and Tourism
23	Business, Management and Accountancy	QAA 40: Business and Management QAA 41: Accountancy
24	Education	QAA 42: Education Studies

HESA Subject Codes

Subject Area

Subject

Medicine & Dentistry

(A1) Pre-Clinical Medicine
(A2) Pre-Clinical Dentistry
(A3) Clinical Medicine
(A4) Clinical Dentistry
(AZ) Balanced combination within Medicine and Dentistry

Subjects Allied to Medicine

(B1) Anatomy and Physiology
(B2) Pharmacology
(B3) Pharmacy
(B4) Nutrition
(B5) Ophthalmics
(B6) Audiology
(B7) Nursing
(B8) Medical Technology
(B9) Other Medical Subjects
(BZ) Balanced combination within Subjects allied to Medicine

Biological Sciences

(C1) Biology
(C2) Botany
(C3) Zoology
(C4) Genetics
(C5) Microbiology
(C6) Molecular Biology and Biophysics
(C7) Biochemistry
(C8) Psychology (not solely as Social Science)
(C9) Other Biological Sciences
(CZ) Balanced combination within Biological Sciences

Veterinary Sciences	(D1) Veterinary Sciences
Agriculture & Related Subjects	(D2) Agriculture (D3) Forestry (D4) Food Science (D8) Agricultural Sciences (D9) Other Agricultural Subjects (DZ) Balanced combination within Agriculture and related subjects
Physical Science	(F1) Chemistry (F2) Materials Science (F3) Physics (F4) Archaeology as a Physical Science (F5) Astronomy (F6) Geology (F7) Oceanography (F8) Geography studies as a science (F9) Environmental Science and other physical sciences (FZ) Balanced combination within Physical Sciences
Mathematical Science	(G1) Mathematics (G4) Statistics (G9) Other Mathematical Sciences (GZ) Balanced combination within Mathematical Sciences
Computer Science	(G5) Computing Science
Engineering & Technology	(H1) General Engineering (H2) Civil Engineering (H3) Mechanical Engineering (H4) Aeronautical Engineering (H5) Electrical Engineering (H6) Electronic Engineering (H7) Production Engineering (H8) Chemical Engineering (H9) Other Engineering (J1) Minerals Technology (J2) Metallurgy (J3) Ceramics and Glasses (J4) Polymers and Textiles (J5) Other Materials Technology (J6) Maritime Technology (J8) Biotechnology (J9) Other Technologies (HZ) Balanced combination within Engineering and Technology
Architecture, Building & Planning	(K1) Architecture (K2) Building (K3) Environmental Technologies (K4) Town and Country Planning (K9) Other Architectural Studies (KZ) Balanced combination within Architecture, Building and Planning

Social, Economic & Political Studies	(L1) Economics (L3) Sociology (L4) Social Policy and Administration (L5) Social Work (L6) Anthropology (L7) Psychology (without significant element of Biological Science) (L8) Geography (unless solely as a Physical Science) (M1) Politics (M9) Other Social Studies (LZ) Balanced combination within Social, Economic & Political Studies
Business & Administrative Studies	(N1) Business and Management Studies (N2) Operational Research (N3) Financial Management (N4) Accountancy (N5) Marketing and Market Research (N6) Industrial Relations (N7) Catering & Institutional Management (N8) Land and Property Management (N9) Transport & Other Business & Administrative Studies (NZ) Balanced combination within Business & Administrative Studies
Law	(M3) Law
Librarianship & Information Science	(P1) Librarianship (P2) Information Science (P3) Communication Studies (P4) Media Studies (P5) Publishing (P6) Journalism (PZ) Balanced combination within Librarianship & Information Science
Languages	(Q1) Linguistics (Q2) Comparative Literature (Q3) English (Q4) American Studies (Q5) Celtic Languages, Literature & Culture (Q6) Latin Language & Literature (Q7) Ancient Greek Language & Literature (Q8) Classics (Q9) Other Ancient Languages & Related Studies (R1) French Language, Literature & Culture (R2) German Language, Literature & Culture (R3) Italian Language, Literature & Culture (R4) Spanish Language, Literature & Culture (R5) Portuguese Language, Literature & Culture (R6) Latin American Languages, Literature & Culture (R7) Scandinavian Languages, Literature & Culture (R8) Russian Languages, Literature & Culture (T1) Slavonic and East-European Languages, Literature & Culture (T2) Other European Languages, Literature & Culture (T3) Chinese Languages, Literature & Culture (T4) Japanese Languages, Literature & Culture (T5) Other Asian Languages, Literature & Culture

	(T6) Modern Middle-Eastern Languages, Literature & Culture
	(T7) African Languages, Literature & Culture
	(T8) Other Language Studies
	(T9) Other Or Unspecified Modern Languages
	(QZ) Balanced combination within Languages
Humanities	(V1) History
	(V3) Economic and Social History
	(V4) History of Art
	(V5) History and Philosophy of Science
	(V6) Archaeology
	(V7) Philosophy
	(V8) Theology and Religious Studies
	(V9) Other Humanities
	(VZ) Balanced combination within Humanities
Creative Arts & Design	(W1) Fine Art
	(W2) Design Studies
	(W3) Music
	(W4) Drama
	(W5) Cinematics
	(W6) Crafts
	(W8) Beauty and Hairdressing
	(W9) Art and Design Other
	(WZ) Balanced combination within Creative Arts & Design
Education	(X1) Teacher Training
	(X2) Physical Education
	(X3) Academic Studies in Education
	(X4) Techniques in Teaching Children
	(X5) Techniques in Teaching Adults
	(X6) Education for those with Special Needs
	(X7) Technology in Education
	(X8) Management and Organisation of Education
	(X9) Other Topics in Education
	(XZ) Balanced combination within Education
Combined	(Y1) Combined or General Science
	(Y2) Combined or General Social Science
	(Y3) Combined or General Arts
	(Y4) Other Combined or General Courses/Modular Courses
	(Y5) Combined General & Leisure Courses Not Elsewhere Specified
	(Y6) Research Methods
	(YZ) Balanced combination across different subject areas