

# Terms of reference and composition of the UK wide Standing Committee

UKSC 16/1  
Agenda Item 2  
3 November 2016

## Background

1. As part of their respective statutory responsibilities, the higher education funding bodies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland sought views on future approaches to assessing the quality of higher education in the universities and colleges they fund or are considering funding. The review was intended to consider what kind of quality assessment arrangements would be necessary as we look towards 2025 and the next decade of the sector's development.
2. The revised Operating Model for Quality Assessment, which was published in March 2016, sets out the new approach to quality assessment to be implemented in England and Northern Ireland from 2016-17. It is intended that the high-level elements set out in the document will be taken forward in Wales in a similar way to the approach adopted in England and Northern Ireland.
3. The revised Operating Model also set out plans for a range of pilot activities that will take place during 2016-17 across England, Wales and Northern Ireland and, in some cases, Scotland. The sector representative bodies will lead this pilot activity where it relates to the development of approaches to further secure degree standards.
4. The responses to the June 2015 consultation on future approaches to quality assessment endorsed the proposal to publish and maintain a baseline requirement for the quality of the academic experience for students. Respondents also identified a series of other requirements that providers should be expected to meet: specifically, a provider's financial sustainability, management and governance arrangements; a provider's ability to meet the expectations of consumer law as expressed through the CMA guidance; and its broader arrangements for student protection. Together these comprise the baseline regulatory requirements, a core element of the revised Operating Model for Quality Assessment
5. The UK-wide Standing Committee brings together the four funding bodies with sector and student representative bodies, to provide co-led and UK-wide oversight of the baseline regulatory requirements and the elements of the revised Operating Model for Quality Assessment that apply across the UK. This Committee will form an important element of a UK-wide co-regulatory approach to quality assessment, and provides an opportunity for the funding, sector and student representative bodies from all four nations to work together in a more collaborative way than has previously been possible.

6. Subject to the will of Parliament, the Standing Committee represents an important step towards the future regulatory landscape as envisaged in the Department for Education's Higher Education and Research Bill. In one of the technical notes<sup>1</sup> that accompany the draft bill, it is proposed that the Office for Students will work with sector and student representative bodies, as well as the Devolved Administrations to convene a UK-wide standing committee to provide co-led governance arrangements for the baseline requirements for academic standards and quality.

## **Purpose of the Committee**

7. The Committee will be required to review and confirm the existing material that constitutes the baseline regulatory requirements, and to provide advice to those sector bodies and organisations responsible for developing each component to ensure they remain fit for purpose.

8. The Committee will act as a mechanism for determining the ongoing development of the Quality Code, as an important and shared UK-wide reference point. It will remain important for this process to be owned by the sector, and for work to be undertaken by the QAA. However, including the Standing Committee in the overarching governance arrangements is deliberately designed to allow the funding bodies to satisfy themselves that the code is developed in such a way that each funding body is able to discharge its own statutory responsibilities and to contribute appropriately to broader, UK wide developments in quality assessment.

9. The Committee will provide information and advice to the four funding bodies in the following areas:

- a) To support the work of the funding bodies in exercising their respective responsibilities for quality assessment; and to support the transition to new approaches to quality assessment for England, Wales and NI.
- b) To ensure a UK-wide approach to quality assessment as far as possible in a devolved environment
- c) To support on-going alignment between UK-wide aspects of quality assessment arrangements and the European Standards and Guidelines.
- d) To recognise and support activities already undertaken and led by providers, as well as setting out requirements for external quality assessment.

10. The Standing Committee will play a key role in overseeing those aspects of the revised quality assessment arrangements that apply across the UK and will act as a

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/550231/he-research-bill-tech-note.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/550231/he-research-bill-tech-note.pdf)

steering group, ensuring there is a strong coordinating mechanism for the following areas of work to which the Higher Education Academy (HEA), the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education (LFHE), the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), and Universities UK will contribute:

- a) Degree standards, training for external examiners, and the calibration of marking practices and classification algorithms.
- b) Support for governing bodies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.
- c) Strategic approach to the UK sector's international activities, including the review of transnational education.

11. The Committee will be required to consider regular reports on the progress and outcomes of the above activity. It will provide recommendations to the funding and sector bodies on the effectiveness of these activities and how they might be implemented on a larger scale. Although all members may have an interest in the full range of activities that are within the remit of the Committee, particular direction will be given by the 'owners' of the different strands of work. (For example, the International strand is owned by the funding bodies rather than the sector bodies, and the LFHE strand is led by England, Wales and NI at this stage).

12. These key areas of work are provided as an illustration of the scope and focus of the Committee's initial activity. Other areas of activity are likely to develop as the implementation of the new quality arrangements progresses and as pilot activity produces outputs. It is therefore intended that the terms of reference for the Committee will be reviewed by the Committee on an annual basis.

## **Authority**

13. While it is convened jointly by the four UK funding bodies, Universities UK and Guild HE, the Committee is not owned by these organisations. Instead, it is co-led and therefore its composition (discussed below) is intended to reflect this.

14. The Committee has the authority to:
- a) Provide advice and make recommendations to the funding bodies and sector bodies, and to delegate authority to its Chair to provide advice and make recommendations on its behalf.
  - b) Establish working groups to undertake specific programmes of work, subject to the agreement of the funding bodies and sector bodies.

- c) Co-opt members, obtain independent professional or expert advice and to secure the attendance of outsiders with relevant experience and expertise if it considers this necessary.
- d) Invite observers from relevant organisations to attend for relevant parts of its business.

## Membership

15. The Committee draws together representatives from across the UK HE sector, including the funding bodies, sector bodies, students, PSRBs and representatives from a diverse range of providers. Members will normally be appointed for a three year term of office in the first instance. Funding body representatives are not subject to term limits. Where membership of the Committee is by virtue of the office held, the membership will normally change in the case of a new appointment to that office.

16. The Committee's membership should reflect a balance of perspectives, skills and experience, including academic members with recent and relevant experience of quality assessment, regulation, assurance and accountability, as well as members with a current understanding of the issues facing providers within the changing regulatory landscape.

17. The Committee will comprise two members who represents the student interest. In addition, a National Union of Students (NUS) staff member will act as a member.

18. The Committee may, if it considers it necessary or desirable, co-opt, for a specified period of time, advisers or specialists with particular expertise.

19. The proposed full composition is as follows:

	Member	Name	Job title / Organisation
1.	Chair	Professor Andrew Wathey	Vice Chancellor, University of Northumbria
2.	Secretary	Dr Scott Court	Head of Quality Team, HEFCE
3.	Sector member	Professor Andy Westwood  or	Professor of Politics and Policy, University of Manchester, Associate Vice President for Public Affairs, University of Winchester, and Director of the University

	(alternate)	<i>TBC</i>	Observatory, University of Wolverhampton
4.	Sector member	Professor Lorna Milne	Vice-Principal (Proctor), University of St Andrews
5.	Sector member	Professor Ben Calvert	Pro-Vice Chancellor, Learning, Teaching and Student Experience, University of South Wales
6.	Sector member	Professor David Jones	Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Education and Students, Queen's University Belfast
7.	Sector member	Alison Wheaton	Chief Executive Officer, GSM London
8.	Sector member	Steve Denton	Chief Operating Officer and Registrar, Nottingham Trent University
9.	Sector member	Jon Renyard	University Secretary & Director for Student Experience, Arts University Bournemouth
10.	AOC representative	Arti Saraswat	HE Policy Manager, AOC
11.	CMA representative (alternate)	Gordon Ashworth or Mike Lambourne	Project Director, CMA Project Director, CMA
12.	CUC representative	John Rushforth	Executive Secretary, CUC
13.	Department for the Economy NI Representative (alternate)	Claire Thompson or Trevor Cooper	Department for the Economy NI
14.	HEFCE representative	Susan Lapworth	Director (Regulation and Assurance), HEFCE
15.	HEFCW representative (alternate)	Celia Hunt or Cliona O'Neill	Director of Strategic Development, HEFCW Head of Student Experience, HEFCW
16.	NUS representative (alternate)	Sorana Vieru or Bethan Dudas	Vice President (Higher Education), NUS Policy Engagement Manager, NUS
17.	OIA representative	Ben Elger	Chief Operating Officer, OIA
18.	PSRB member	<i>TBC</i>	

19.	QAA representative	Douglas Blackstock	Chief Executive, QAA
20.	SFC representative	Alison Cook	Assistant Director of Learning & Quality and Outcome Manager Ayrshire, SFC
21.	Student member	<i>TBC</i>	
22.	Student member	<i>TBC</i>	
23.	UUK representative	William Hammonds	Programme Manager
24.	GuildHE representative	Alex Bols	Deputy CEO

20. The membership of the Committee will be reviewed at the first meeting and subsequently on an annual basis to ensure that it comprises an appropriate balance of perspectives, skills and experience.

## Meeting arrangements

21. It is envisaged that the Committee will meet three or four times a year, in London wherever possible. The Chair may call an ad hoc meeting if it is required. Work may be undertaken by correspondence, and between scheduled meeting dates. Where it is not feasible to travel to London, a meeting may make use of video or telephone conferencing, provided the number of centres involved is not too great as to be unwieldy for the proper conduct of business.

22. Only members of the Committee have a right to attend meetings. When a member is unable to attend a meeting and would like to nominate an alternate, this will be at the discretion of the Chair (requests should be made through the Secretary). Funding body representatives are not subject to the above restrictions on substitute attendees.

## Reporting

23. Meetings will be minuted and the draft minutes sent for approval to the Chair, and subsequently to the rest of the Committee.

24. The Committee can provide its advice and recommendations to the funding bodies and to sector groups in the following ways:

- a) Through providing a formal written report following discussion at a Committee meeting.
- b) Through oral updates and discussions with representatives at the Committee meeting.

- c) Through Chair's action decisions between meetings, if delegated by the Committee to the Chair.

25. The Committee's terms of reference and/or effectiveness will be reviewed on an annual or as required basis to ensure this keeps pace with developments, with a more thorough review carried out periodically. The outcomes of such reviews will be reported to the funding bodies.