

## UK-wide Standing Committee for Quality Assessment

### Minutes of the first meeting, held on Thursday 3 November 2016 at HEFCE Office, Finlaison House, London

#### In attendance

##### Members:

Professor Andrew Wathey (Chair, Northumbria University)  
Will Hammonds (UUK)  
Alex Bols (GuildHE)  
Arti Saraswat (AOC)  
Gordon Ashworth (CMA)  
Mike Lamborne (CMA)  
John Rushforth (CUC)  
Claire Thompson (Department for the Economy, NI)  
Cliona O'Neill (HEFCW)  
Sorana Vieru (NUS)  
Bethan Dudas (NUS)  
Ben Elger (OIA)  
Douglas Blackstock (QAA)  
Alison Cook (SFC)  
Susan Lapworth (HEFCE)  
Jon Reynard (Arts University Bournemouth)  
Steve Denton (Nottingham Trent University)  
Alison Wheaton (GSM London)  
Professor Ben Calvert (University of South Wales)  
Professor Lorna Milne (University of St Andrews)  
Professor Andy Westwood (University of Manchester, University of Winchester, University of Wolverhampton)

##### HEFCE Officers:

Scott Court, Head of Quality (Secretary)  
Jack Thompson (Clerk)

#### Item 1 Chair's welcome and apologies

1. The Chair welcomed members to the first meeting of the Committee. He explained that the Committee provided a space where principles of collaboration, co-ownership and co-regulation could be realised. Members noted that the committee was not owned by any particular body, but was co-owned by the sector and funding bodies. He reminded members that the overarching mission of the Committee was to ensure a high quality academic experience for students, with reliable standards that are reasonably comparable across the UK. The committee's values were UK-wide and collaborative, and business would be conducted in this spirit.

## **Item 2 Terms of reference and composition of the UK-wide Standing Committee**

2. Scott Court provided a short introduction to the paper which outlined the purpose and remit of the committee. Members noted that additional areas of work were likely to arise over time, and the terms of reference would be reviewed annually. Remaining gaps in membership were expected to be filled by the next meeting. Members noted that UUK and GuildHE representatives, recorded as observers on the originally circulated terms of reference, would be changed to full members.
3. The committee briefly discussed the strands of work being undertaken by the Higher Education Academy (HEA), the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education (LFHE) and the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), and the degree classification algorithm work being undertaken by UUK and GuildHE. It was clarified that these areas of work had resulted from the Quality Assessment Review, and required UK-wide co-ordination, hence oversight by the committee.
4. The purpose of the committee was agreed subject to the following changes:
  - “Ensuring a UK-wide approach to quality assessment as far as possible in a devolved environment” should be included explicitly as a purpose of the committee
  - The reference to LFHE work in paragraph 11 should mention Welsh involvement
  - The UKSC should ensure that it recognises and supports activities already undertaken and led by providers, as well as setting out requirements for external quality assessment. This would better reflect the co-regulatory nature of the committee.
5. Membership of the committee was agreed subject to the following changes and clarifications:
  - Funding body representatives should not be subject to 3 year terms, nor restrictions on substitute attendees.
  - The terms of reference should explicitly state that co-ownership includes different types of providers, such as colleges and alternative providers, as well as different nations.
6. Members noted that additional work was anticipated to be required of them in between scheduled quarterly meetings. The committee agreed that minutes of the committee should be made publicly available in the interests of transparency.

**ACTION: Redrafted terms of reference will be circulated to members for agreement by HEFCE.**

## **Item 3 Baseline Regulatory Requirements**

7. Scott Court introduced the paper, which outlined the seven proposed elements of the baseline regulatory requirements. Responses to the Quality Assessment Review

endorsed the proposal to publish and maintain a set of baseline requirements for the sector.

8. Members noted that careful consideration needed to be given to the UK-wide applicability of the requirements. It was agreed that a matrix detailing applicability across each nation should be added for clarity.

**ACTION: HEFCE to draft a matrix of applicability across nations for publishing alongside the Baseline Regulatory Requirements**

9. The funding bodies had already provided feedback on the draft requirements and were content with the wording, subject to the following change:
  - Requirement e) should be rephrased to reflect that the listed expressions of student protection measures are non-exhaustive examples.
10. Members noted that the CMA guidance was widely applicable across nations, although there were some legal nuances behind it. Gordon Ashworth (CMA) would continue to provide guidance on the wording of the student protection requirement, to ensure it was legally accurate.
11. Requirement e), compliance with the OIA's good practice framework, was further discussed. Members noted that including this element in the baseline regulatory requirements meant that a regulatory judgement would be made on the basis of compliance with non-compulsory guidance. After consideration, members were content that this requirement was workable.
12. It was confirmed that the baseline regulatory requirements had already been discussed with the Home Office. The Home Office has confirmed that a provider that is successfully assessed against the baseline regulatory requirements will be considered to meet the Educational Oversight requirements for tier 4 sponsorship purposes.
13. It was clarified that alternative providers are currently regulated separately and will remain outside the scope of the baseline regulatory requirements until such time as the HE Bill is passed and the OfS single regulatory framework fully implemented. There was a discussion about how providers operating outside of the regulated sector (i.e. alternative providers that are not designated for student support) would be held to account. It was confirmed that such providers were only subject to oversight from their validating or awarding body, although the HE Bill sought to bring more providers into the regulated sector through registration.
14. The committee agreed that the proposed baseline regulatory requirements were sufficiently comprehensive, subject to the following wording changes:
  - instead of considering the integrity of 'degree standards', the focus should be on academic standards more generally
  - language referring to 'sufficiently' or 'appropriately' high quality should be removed
  - it was recognised that a number of wording changes would be needed should the HE Bill be passed. For example, student protection arrangements in

England as currently described in the baseline regulatory requirements would be superseded by different measures proposed in the draft legislation.

15. There was a short discussion about how the effectiveness of the baseline regulatory requirements would be measured. One key measure would be the types and outcomes of providers accepted or not accepted through the entry gateway. Initial work looking at the effectiveness of the current gateway arrangements was already being undertaken. It was agreed that a note outlining the intention to evaluate the new baseline regulatory requirements should be added to the paper. It was also agreed that a clear statement of the purpose and focus of each element of the requirements would be required alongside their publication.
16. The committee agreed that the most important next step was to plan how the requirements would be communicated to students. Advice would be sought from the NUS on the best ways to reach students, and members were encouraged to consider what communication channels might prove most effective. Gordon Ashworth reported the CMA's experience of engaging with students through channels such as social media, web chats, and forums had proved successful, and could be usefully shared. QAA's annual conference on quality for student representatives was suggested as a possible route.

#### **Item 4 Future Work of the Standing Committee**

17. Scott Court introduced this item. Updates from the QAA, LFHE and HEA on their strands of work were highlighted. The committee noted it would become more involved in this work and members could expect to be asked for some input before the next meeting. The committee's detailed feedback would be needed as pilot activities are further developed in Spring/Summer 2017, and the committee will have a role to play in providing future direction to the project teams for post-pilot activities. More detailed reports will be provided at the January committee meeting. Members requested that project plans and timelines be circulated in the meantime.

**ACTION: HEFCE to circulate project plans and timelines to members.**

18. The committee noted that all four nations were involved in the work on international activity, and degree standards, while support for governing bodies only involved England, Wales and Northern Ireland. It was confirmed that funding bodies in all nations had been involved in the contracting decisions and had provided feedback on proposed initial lines of enquiry. It was confirmed that colleges were represented amongst piloting providers, and were represented in the governance of the projects.
19. Members agreed that the Standing Committee would provide oversight of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education as a key element of the baseline regulatory requirements. The development of the Quality Code had previously been overseen by a sector steering group convened by the QAA. It was agreed it would be helpful to revisit the role of this group given the UKSC's remit for providing oversight for the future development of the Code.
20. It was noted that it would be helpful to see a joined up approach between UK-wide activities and those being undertaken in individual nations. Members agreed that a

standing item at each meeting should be an update on the latest activities in each devolved nation. The committee was also in favour of producing a map between devolved and UK-wide activities, and some illustration of the number and types of providers involved in each strand of activity.

**ACTION: HEFCE to produce a map of quality activities across devolved nations.**

21. It was agreed that a plan for simplified, student-focused communications needed to be added to the proposed future work of the committee as a priority.

**ACTION: HEFCE to update the committee on progress in this area at the next meeting.**

22. The chair invited members to submit expressions of interest to Scott Court, identifying any particular areas of the committee's work they would be interested in contributing to. The committee would then be split into sub-groups to complete necessary work by circulation. This work was expected to begin in the next four to five weeks.

**ACTION: Members to submit expressions of interest to Scott Court regarding specific areas of work they would like to contribute to, outside of formal committee meetings.**

#### **Item 5 Any Other Business**

23. No other business was raised.

#### **Item 6 Date of next meeting**

24. Time and date to be confirmed, January 2017 at HEFCE's London offices, Finlaison House, Furnival Street, London.

<b>Action</b>	<b>Owner</b>
Circulate redrafted terms of reference to members for agreement	HEFCE
Draft a matrix of applicability across nations for publishing alongside the Baseline Regulatory Requirements	HEFCE
Circulate project plans and timelines for projects to members.	HEFCE
Produce a map of quality activities across devolved nations.	HEFCE
Provide an update for the committee on progress of student focussed communications at the next meeting.	HEFCE
Submit expressions of interest to Scott Court regarding specific areas of work members would like to contribute to, outside of formal committee meetings.	All members