

**UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment  
Minutes of meeting held on Wednesday 14 February 2019 at OfS offices, Finlaison House,  
London**

**Attendees:**

Will Hammonds (UUK) (Chair)  
Dr Dee Bird (SFC)  
Dr Cliona O'Neill (HEFCW)  
Susan Lapworth (OfS)  
Dr Charlotte Snelling (UUK): for item 6 only  
Hannah Sketchley (NUS): substitute for Amatey Doku  
Kate Wicklow (GuildHE): substitute for Alex Bols  
Ben Elger (OIA)  
John Rushforth (CUC)  
Douglas Blackstock (QAA)  
Charlotte Gorse (Istituto Marangoni)  
Professor John Sawkins (Heriot-Watt University)  
Jon Renyard (Arts University Bournemouth)  
Professor Mary Bishop (Independent)

**Apologies:**

Professor Andrew Wathey (Chair)  
Dr Arti Saraswat (AoC)  
Professor Ben Calvert (University of South Wales)  
Gavin Campbell (Department for the Economy, NI)  
Gordon Ashworth (CMA)  
Professor David S Jones (Queen's University Belfast)  
Steve Denton (Nottingham Trent University)

**Secretariat:** Gemma Tombs, Neil Gaskin.

**Item 1: Chair's welcome and apologies (Chair)**

1. Will Hammonds introduced the meeting and noted that the committee's Chair Andrew Wathey was unwell and unable to attend the meeting, and that he would be chairing in his absence. He welcomed Dee Bird to the committee as the new SFC representative, and Hannah Sketchley, Kate Wicklow and Mary Bishop who had not previously attended the UKSCQA and were attending as alternates.

**Item 2: Formal approval of minutes (Chair)**

2. The Chair introduced the minutes of the October 2018 meeting and the committee agreed that they were a full and accurate record of this meeting.
3. HEFCW asked if QAA's proposals on academic integrity could be added to AOB for this meeting, which the Chair approved.

**Item 3: Update from the UK funding bodies / regulators (Chair)**

4. As there was no representative from Northern Ireland for this meeting, updates were provided by HEFCW, SFC and the OfS.
5. SFC informed the committee that it was in steady state and there was nothing to update from Scotland.
6. HEFCW advised the committee that it was currently updating its quality assessment framework. It had a particular interest in discussing the future of the characteristic statements and subject benchmarks and asked if these could be added to the agenda in the future. The secretariat agreed that these could be discussed with Andrew Wathey and potentially added to a future agenda.

**Action: Secretariat to discuss with Andrew Wathey adding subject benchmark statements and classification statements to a future agenda.**

7. OfS updated the committee on its ongoing registration process. As of the beginning of the week it had registered 301 providers, and 207 of these had enhanced monitoring arrangements in place. These were mostly in relation to quality and standards, often associated with condition B3 – and where the OfS was undertaking enhanced monitoring for condition B3, this was often linked to concerns around condition B2.

**Item 4: Update from QAA on strategic international engagement and Malaysia review (QAA)**

8. The Chair invited Douglas Blackstock to provide an update on QAA's planned review of transnational education arrangements in Malaysia. QAA informed the committee that UUK had endorsed the Malaysia review, and would update the committee on progress in March.
9. The committee discussed the importance of making it clear to international audiences that the UK HE sector remains committed to transnational education and has in place effective mechanisms to quality assure this activity. UUK and QAA informed the committee that a working group was in place to develop future QAA TNE review activity following the Malaysia review, and would report in April 2019.

**Item 5: Committee matters (Chair)**

10. The Chair informed the committee that due to Andrew Wathey's absence, paper UKSC 19/1 would be discussed at the meeting scheduled for 21 March. The secretariat then informed the committee that the Memorandum of Understanding was currently in development following a meeting between the Chair and representatives from the funders/regulators in November.

**Item 6: Transparent, consistent and fair academic standards consultation (UUK)**

11. The Chair welcomed Charlotte Snelling from Universities UK who joined the meeting for this item and provided an update on the progress of the consultation. 168 people had attended the five consultation events held across the UK, and 136 responses had been submitted to the consultation survey hosted on the QAA website. This had closed on 8 February, and UUK and QAA were currently analysing the responses received and would provide a detailed update at the 21 March meeting. Responses to the consultation had been positive with a clear recognition that the sector needed to take action in this space in order to reassure the public and other stakeholders about the value of degrees. Consensus had emerged during these events that a formal response (i.e. the proposed statement of intent) was needed from the UKSCQA.
12. A question was raised about who the statement of intent was for, and whether it was actually necessary. The UKSCQA agreed that any statement would be for providers to use and for public and international consumption. It would be designed to demonstrate that there is a UK-wide agreed approach to ensuring degree standards and that providers are signed up to it. UUK further emphasised that it viewed the statement as a set of high-level principles that the sector bodies had signed up to, and that this should sit at the UK level. It would not be a universal solution but instead a framework through which providers and national sectors could take action as they saw fit.

**Action: UUK to work with individual nations in order to ensure that each nation's views were represented in the consultation outcomes.**

13. SFC and the sector representative from Scotland informed the committee that it was undertaking further research into degree outcomes in Scotland following the UKSCQA's

research and analysis published in November of last year. This was being used to further provider, funder and ministerial understanding of the Scottish context in particular, and would inform the national responses in Scotland.

14. OfS advised the committee that whilst it had a particular interest in some of the outcomes from the consultation – namely the proposed degree classification criteria – it had no objection to decoupling its work from the UK-wide work in order to ensure that the proposed statement of intent could progress according to a timeline that worked for all nations.
15. UUK agreed that it would consider all of this feedback and bring an update to the March meeting of the UKSCQA. It, and GuildHE, would also engage with their respective Boards and senior staff on the consultation outcomes and proposed statement of intent prior to the March meeting of the UKSCQA.

**Action: UUK and GuildHE to review proposed statement of intent in line with feedback from the committee and bring an update to the March meeting.**

**Item 7: Support for governing bodies project (Chair)**

17. The Chair introduced a summary report from Advance Higher Education which concluded the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education's work on support for governing bodies. The UKSCQA held a discussion on the importance of this work and the effectiveness of this programme. The OfS informed members that this programme had been helpful during its registration process and would inform its approach to regulation. Whilst there appeared to be compliance with relevant codes of governance on paper, this did not appear to be occurring in practice, and the OfS would continue to look at this for registered providers.
18. During the course of discussion, members also noted the following points:
  - a. The programme had only captured responses from 38 users of the materials produced as part of this programme. Therefore it may not be possible to fully understand the reach of the project. The impact for student governors was of particular interest but unclear in the report outcomes.
  - b. There is a good deal of guidance out there for governing bodies, but use is variable and the good practice which was already out there needed to be embedded.
  - c. The Committee of University Chairs was currently revising its guidance in response to the need to ensure sufficient engagement of governors.
  - d. It was important to consider the skillset of the governing body in its entirety rather than individual governors – each would bring different skills to the collective group.

**Item 8: Mapping of the FHEQ against the European Quality Framework (EQF) (QAA)**

19. QAA informed the committee that it had recently been invited to contribute to a re-mapping of the quality arrangements across the UK to the European Quality Framework. This mapping would reflect technical changes only, and would not make any changes to the FHEQ.
20. QAA advised the committee that the individual regulatory/funding bodies would want to ensure that their own arrangements are accurately described and that it would ensure they were able to confirm this.
21. There was no input required from the committee. QAA will bring a final update once the mapping has been finalised.

**Action: QAA to update the committee once the FHEQ/EQF mapping is finalised.**

**Item 9: AOB (Chair)**

22. There was one item of AOB, added at HEFCW's request. This was a request for QAA to provide an update on its work relating to academic integrity.

23. QAA provided a background to the work for the committee, noting that there was significant concern about the scale of growth of essay mills in recent years, and the threat this posed to academic integrity. The Secretary of State for Education in England was particularly concerned about this. QAA had suggested three options for a sector-wide response to these challenges, including a proposal to create an Academic Integrity Centre. It was currently testing the sector's appetite for this.
24. The funders/regulators present at the meeting (HEFCW, OfS and SFC) agreed with QAA that it would be appropriate for any work to be funded by the sector via QAA's voluntary subscription model. OfS further emphasised that it would need QAA to work at the sector level rather than provider level in England, in order to avoid conflicts with its DQB role. At a previous meeting between the chief executives of the funders/regulators and the Chair of the UKSCQA, it had been agreed that the strategic direction for this work should sit with the UKSCQA as HEFCW, OfS, SFC and DfENI would wish to receive advice from the UKSCQA on the programme's outcomes.
25. A number of other committee members expressed significant interest in this work and identified priorities for further development in this area. The OIA representative advised the UKSCQA that it also had an interest in this work due to the volume of student complaints around the use of essay mills, whilst CUC noted that university chairs would take a view that it was important to take action to address essay mills. GuildHE felt that whilst it was important to take a sector-wide view, the UKSCQA should also be aware that this was an international problem and might require an international strategy.
26. UUK emphasised that it would be important to consider the focus and core objectives of QAA's proposed work on academic integrity. UUK suggested that targeted action on essay mills in particular might be the best mechanism for ensuring quick and effective outcomes from the activity. NUS agreed with this, but emphasised a clear need for a two-pronged approach to address this: sector/legislative support to address essay mills, but also focusing on support for students in order to address the reasons why students might be using essay mills. A solely punitive approach would not be effective in improving academic integrity.
27. The committee held a further discussion on potential legislative action to address essay mills. SFC and HEFCW advised that this was a matter for the UK government as opposed to the devolved administrations, and QAA informed the committee that there was draft legislation in the Republic of Ireland to address essay mills.
28. The UKSCQA agreed that there would need to be further discussion on potential action around academic integrity/essay mills, and that QAA would bring an update to the committee on its plans in due course.
29. The Chair thanked members for their contributions and confirmed that the next meeting would be held at the OfS offices in Finlaison House, London, on 21 March 2019, 13:00-15:00.