

UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 13th September 2022 at 15:00 p.m. at Woburn House, Tavistock Square, London

Attendees:

Professor Nic Beech (**Chair**, Middlesex University)
Professor Clare Peddie (**Deputy Chair**, University of St Andrews)
Alex Bols (GuildHE)
Professor Amanda Chetwynd (Lancaster University)
Charlotte Corrish (OIAHE)
Chloe Field (NUS)
Brian Green (University of Strathclyde)
Nick Holland (Office for Students)
Ondrej Kucerák (Aberdeen University Students' Association)
Sam Maesschalck (Lancaster University Students' Association)
Kathryn O'Loan (Scottish Funding Council)
Dr Cliona O'Neill (HEFCW)
Alex Proudfoot (Independent HE)
Jon Renyard (Arts University Bournemouth)
David Rooney (Department for the Economy, NI)
John Rushforth (CUC)
Dr Arti Saraswat (Association of Colleges)
Dr Charlotte Snelling (Universities UK)
Tom Yates (QAA)

Apologies:

Professor Mary Bishop
Steve Denton (Nottingham Trent University)
Ben Elger (OIAHE)
Professor David Jones (Queen's University Belfast)
Rebecca Morrison (Northeastern University – London)
Vicki Stott (QAA)
Claire Taylor (Wrexham Glyndwr University)

Secretariat

Tom Rowe (Universities UK)

Item 1: Welcome from the Chair / Welcome new members / Apologies received

1. The Chair, Professor Nic Beech, opened the meeting. Apologies received were noted. He also welcomed new GuildHE nominee Rebecca Morrison from Northeastern University – London.

Item 2: Approval of the minutes of previous meetings

2. Minutes of the June 2022 meeting (**UKSC Min/22**) were approved by the committee with some minor clarifications on the actions. UUK reported that it had published its commitment to degree classifications on behalf of member institutions in England and would continue to work with the sector on building the evidence base around grade inflation. After this update, it was agreed that all the actions arising from the last meeting were either covered by the topics on the agenda today, had been resolved, or would be revisited as and when appropriate.

Item 3: Update from funders / regulators and cross-nation matters

3. The Chair invited the funders and regulators to update the committee on any relevant recent developments.
4. OfS confirmed that it had published its consultation on (i) student outcomes, and (ii) TEF assessments. OfS also reported that it was working with QAA and engaging providers on long term arrangements from March 2023 when QAA would discontinue as the designated quality body in England. As part of their work on a revised approach to quality and standards, OfS had published an inside brief on grade inflation in July and were calling for assessors to feed into internal processes. Susan Lapworth had also been announced as the new Chief Executive for OfS.
5. HEFCW confirmed that it had published its updated quality assessment framework and was continuing to work with QAA on a new quality enhancement review methodology which would seek to achieve alignment across Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.
6. DFE-NI reported positive developments on budgetary concerns in Northern Ireland. DFE-NI also reported that it had submitted a business case for procurement work for the design of a new quality model promoting commonalities across the four nations and was awaiting approval.
7. SFC reported the Scottish government had announced an Independent Review of the Skills Delivery Landscape, focusing on the functions and remit of Skills Development Scotland. The Review will report to Ministers in the Spring of next year. SFC also reported that its recruitment campaign had ended as it was no longer sustainable due to a tightened budget.

Item 4: Updates from student representatives

8. Student members began by expressing their concerns on universities overrecruiting and the potential negative impact this could have on campus space and overall student experience. UUK reported that its members were thinking about space and capacity issues, particularly in the context of the cost-of-living crisis with students potentially relying more on campus facilities.
9. NUS expressed its concern over the cost-of-living and the impact this could have on student wellbeing and engagement. It was noted that the cost-of-living crisis could have long lasting repercussions on student wellbeing, the accommodation market, and on retention rates. Student members also expressed concern about differential levels of

support, particularly for PGR and international students. DFE-NI reported it was anticipating a hardship funding announcement in Northern Ireland.

Item 5: Quality frameworks across the nations of the UK

10. OfS provided an update on the UK-wide Joint Statement authored by OfS, HEFCW, DFE-NI, and the SFC, reporting that final revisions were being made to the document and these were minor amendments to the version shared at the June 2022 meeting. It was agreed that, once finalised, the document would be circulated via email correspondence for member endorsement. UUK agreed to publish the final version to the UKSCQA website.

Actions:

- **The secretariat will circulate the finalised version of the UK-wide Joint Statement for the committee to review and endorse**
- **UUK will publish the final version to the UKSCQA website**

Item 6: Final reflections on the UKSCQA awayday

11. The Chair reflected on the high-quality discussion during the awayday session on what the UKSCQA can do to help improve the diversity and strength of student engagement on quality across the UK. Members were invited to provide their reflections:

- It was suggested that the committee could work on curating good practice on student engagement. Examples included training and enabling students to contribute to university councils and thinking about different levels and modes of engagement such as agenda setting, filtering and decision-making.
- There was a question about the extent to which student engagement was within the remit of the committee or the sector more broadly. It was suggested that although the committee's focus had traditionally been on regulatory aspects, it would be beneficial to think about the committee's role going forward and how it could help shape wider discussions in the sector.
- It was agreed that an initial scoping activity to identify gaps in student partnership and quality would be a necessary first step before committing to projects in this area.
- It was agreed that student engagement would be an agenda item at the next meeting and members were invited to bring suggestions on what the committee should pursue in this area.

12. The Chair reflected on the equally high-quality discussion on what the UKSCQA can do to help support and enhance the international reputation of UK quality. The Chair invited members to reflect on whether this topic required its own specific project or was a useful discussion for informing the committee's work more generally:

- It was suggested that a useful first step would be to gauge the international response to the UK-Wide Joint Statement, although OfS emphasised that the purpose of the document was to support regulators rather than promote UK quality to international stakeholders.

- It was agreed that the UK brand was bigger than the remit of the UKSCQA, but the committee had the potential to be an important voice internationally and within the sector.
- The Deputy Chair highlighted the point raised within the discussion about the risk posed by unaffiliated institutions operating under the UK brand internationally but not upholding the same quality standards. CUC noted that it was important to help governing bodies understand this risk and embed both governing and regulatory bodies into the UK brand framework.
- The Chair reflected that it was important to be proactive rather than reactive and suggested adding international risk assessment as an agenda item at the next committee meeting.

13. The Chair concluded by inviting members to highlight their priorities going forward. Suggestions included:

- Quality assurance for PhD students (Student Member)
- Contract cheating (OfS)
- The implications of tertiary developments (SFC)
- Climate change and sustainable teaching and learning (CUC)
- Building a positive narrative around UK HE quality

It was agreed that the next meeting would include an agenda item on communicating a positive narrative around HE for the committee to propagate and enable.

Actions:

- **Student engagement, international risk assessment, and building a positive narrative around quality in UK HE to be agenda items at the next committee meeting to build on initial discussions from the awayday**

Item 7: Any Other Business

14. Tom Rowe (UUK) reported that this would be his last UKSCQA meeting as Secretary. The Chair and Deputy Chair thanked Mr Rowe for his work.

The meeting then concluded.

