

UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment

Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 16 February 2023 at 13:30 via videoconference

Attendees

Professor Nic Beech (**Chair**, Middlesex University)
Professor Clare Peddie (**Deputy Chair**, University of St Andrews)
Professor Mary Bishop
Dr Alex Bols (GuildHE)
Professor Amanda Chetwynd (Lancaster University)
Alastair Delaney (QAA)
Sophie Douglas (Universities Wales)
Ben Elger (OIAHE)
Chloe Field (NUS)
Brian Green (University of Strathclyde)
Dr Nick Holland (Office for Students)
Ondrej Kucerák (Aberdeen University Students' Association)
Sam Maesschalck (Lancaster University Students' Association)
Rebecca Morrison (Northeastern University – London)
Kathryn O'Loan (Scottish Funding Council)
Dr Cliona O'Neill (HEFCW)
Alex Proudfoot (Independent HE)
David Rooney (Department for the Economy, NI)
John Rushforth (CUC)
Dr Charlotte Snelling (Universities UK)
Professor Claire Taylor (Glyndwr)
Dr Amanda Wilcox (AHUA)

Apologies

Professor David Jones (Queen's University Belfast)
Jon Renyard (Arts University Bournemouth)
Dr Arti Saraswat (Association of Colleges)
Vicki Stott (QAA)

Secretariat

Dr Laura Brassington (Universities UK)

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

1. The Chair opened the meeting. Apologies were noted. The Chair welcomed new members: Amanda Wilcox (replacing Steve Denton as AHUA representative) and Laura Brassington (replacing Tom Rowe as UUK Secretariat).
2. Attendees consented to the meeting being recorded, and to comments being attributed to their respective organisations in the minutes.

Item 2: Approval of the minutes of previous meeting

3. The Committee approved the minutes of the September 2022 meeting (**UKSC Min/22**).

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

4. The Chair invited the funders and regulators to update the Committee on relevant recent developments.
5. SFC reported that they are continuing to develop their approach to quality assurance and enhancement and have founded a steering group to this end.
6. SFC reported that the Scottish Government has applied for representation on EQAR in addition to UK Government-level representation. SFC will update the UKSCQA on the outcome.
7. SFC have received a request through DfE for input into ENIC, a statistics database on UK qualifications and profiles.
8. OfS reported that they are preparing to take on assessment functions from the DQB from 1 April around registration. OfS is speaking to providers in this transitional period.
9. OfS is continuing with the quality investigations they have opened.
10. OfS is in the process of setting its business plan priorities and expects to publish another document at the beginning of the next financial year.
11. OfS has published relevant documents since the last meeting of the UKSCQA on the statutory framework for quality and standards and the role of the OfS and the DQB (January), and a short statement about how HE quality is regulated in England.
12. HEFCW reported that work continues around the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (CTER). In preparation, joint work with QAA, the Welsh Government, and HEFCW is underway to look at the features of an overarching quality framework which demonstrates the level of commonality across sectors.
13. HEFCW is updating its quality enhancement review methods to focus increasingly on enhancement while also maintaining focus on assurance. This is being carried out by QAA in response to a request from HEFCW.
14. The Welsh Government is in the process of applying for EQAR governmental membership.
15. HEFCW is commissioning various pieces of work, including on the postgraduate research experience and the post-pandemic blend between PT/ FT/ blended learning. The work is intended to inform CTER when implemented.
16. HEFCW has just finished a big funding review, in which it looked at different ways of funding and how funding could be distributed more equitably across the piece. HEFCW is likely to recommend CTER take this forward.
17. DFE-NI reported that they are in the final stages of gaining approval for the design of their new quality model.
18. DFE-NI are undergoing a funding review, with a focus on sustainability. Ahead of what is expected to be a very difficult budget announcement at end of next week, there are concerns about knock-on effects on HE.
19. There was a short discussion about what the new Government department (DSIT) could mean for HE, with a focus on potential impact on students. It was noted that concerns about quality should be raised with the OIA.

Actions

- UKSCQA to keep up with UUK's work on sustainability of funding across the whole sector.
- UKSCQA to be guided by UUK on putting item on agenda where quality is implicated for future meetings.

Item 4: Update on conversations around UK-wide regulation

20. OfS reported that they took down the UK-wide statement on regulation across the four nations in November 2022 in light of EQAR's concerns about England's compliance with

the ESG. OfS will be seeking clarification from EQAR about this. The four funders/ regulators have agreed to come together soon to see if they can agree to a new statement.

21. HEFCW noted the value of a sector-wide piece on HE from the delivery perspective, recognising the diversity of the sector across the UK with UUKi, GuildHE, AoC and others taking the lead.
22. The Chair welcomed the cooperation of the four funders/ regulators in producing a joint statement.
23. It was suggested that the UKSCQA could play a role both in producing an infographic/ thought piece and knowledge curation. It was agreed that any work should take into account partner institutions and be mindful of accessibility both within and outside the sector.

Actions

- Four funders/ regulators to continue to work together to finalise a statement on UK-wide regulation.
- Members of the UKSCQA to work together on an infographic/ information piece on outcomes of quality assurance processes.

Item 5: Updates from student representatives

24. NUS reported that the second investigation into antisemitism has concluded and the report is now fully available online. There is an action plan and NUS has agreed to all recommendations.
25. NUS's plans over the next 18 months will be encouraging political parties to include HE commitments in their manifestos.
26. NUS reported that from speaking to students and updates to their survey, the cost of living is severely affecting students. Student accommodation shortages were highlighted as a key concern.
27. NUS highlighted concerns about international students.
28. The Chair underlined the importance of diversity and inclusion.
29. Lancaster University Students' Association reported that there have been conversations around moving away from the 'one student, one PhD thesis' model and how to ensure students can finish in three/ three and a half years.
30. Concerns around the effects of industrial action on postgraduate students were voiced, given their status as both students and teachers.
31. Aberdeen University Students' Association reported that it has been more difficult to engage students in quality matters during the cost of living crisis and industrial action.

Action

- The UKSCQA to keep students' concerns embedded in its work.

Item 6: Strategic direction of the UKSCQA (medium- and long-term)

32. The Chair praised the work of the UKSCQA in bringing together different voices and viewpoints and invited members to consider how best to make it fit for the future, thinking especially about the changing make-up of students and staff, the cost of living crisis, and the nature of assessment.
33. The Chair proposed a series of roundtables with volunteers from the UKSCQA to envisage how the Committee can continue to maximise its potential for good.
34. Members confirmed their interest in participating in the roundtables.

Action

- To set up working groups/ roundtables to feed back to the UKSCQA.

Item 7: Impact of industrial action on quality and assessment and planned mitigations

35. The Chair invited members of the Committee to share their views on the topic.
36. It was noted that the same remedies do not work for all students and some international students, in particular, may not understand their rights during industrial action.
37. The Chair noted the layers of complexity around the issue, including divergence across the sector, and the need to be mindful of students who may be particularly disadvantaged by the industrial action.

Action

- The UKSCQA to keep a watching brief.

Item 8: Tertiary education

38. HEFCW summarised their paper on the topic and the key tasks to be undertaken, including whether or not to appoint a DQB, a quality framework/s, a learner engagement code, and a quality committee.
39. It was suggested that there may be some general principles the UKSCQA could discuss around a tertiary approach to quality assessment.

Action

- To consider an agenda item/ a discussion piece for the next UKSCQA meeting/ away day.

Item 9: Student engagement in quality

40. The Chair introduced the topic and paper by summarising conversations that took place at the away day in September 2022.
41. The Chair proposed that the UKSCQA host a series of roundtables to share best practice in improving the diversity of voices in governance, and play a role in knowledge curation and improving the accessibility of existing work in this area.
42. It was noted that full-time student union/ association staff are a hugely valuable source of knowledge and support, and it would be helpful to engage with this group.
43. It was agreed that a helpful starting point for discussions could be around moving away from a to-do list of actions to measuring the impact of actions.

Action

- To curate think pieces/ set up a series of roundtables.

Item 10: Update on development of QAA's new strategy

44. QAA reported that they are developing a new organisational strategy in light of changes both to QAA and to the landscape of HE in the UK and internationally.
45. QAA highlighted three areas of the new strategy:
 - a. QAA's new role in England, after having demitted from the DQB;
 - b. QAA's role in the tertiary sector; and
 - c. QAA's growing international work.
46. QAA have been consulting on these issues since mid-January, and has identified the following themes:
 - a. There is clear support for QAA's role as a 'critical friend' to institutions providing expert advice on quality and standards.
 - b. There is encouragement for QAA to be confident in describing its role and the work they offer.
 - c. There is an appetite for QAA to articulate more clearly how a UK-wide quality assurance agency can add value to the sector by, for example, maintaining

reference points and having insight into current challenges such as Open AI and ChatGPT.

47. QAA have reflected on the need for accessibility to different audiences.

48. QAA are now in the redrafting stage and hoping to take a draft to their board in mid-March which they would then be able to publish.

Action

- QAA to update the next meeting of the UKSCQA.

Item 11: Grade inflation

49. UUK took the paper on degree classification as read.

50. UUK suggested that the UKSCQA website could be updated to reflect the Committee's work in this area.

51. UUK updated the UKSCQA on upcoming projects, including work with Advance HE and CUC on improving understanding of degree standards and quality, reflecting on the experience of governors, and thinking about what support might be needed to improve engagement on these issues.

52. UUK stated their intention to work with other bodies to consider next steps where the need for further support is identified.

Action

- To keep a watching brief.

Item 12: Academic integrity and assessment design, with reference to AI

53. The UKSCQA agreed that this is a crucial issue and discussed how the different organisations represented on the Committee are facing these challenges.

54. NUS voiced concerns from the student perspective around how to prevent students from feeling they need to turn to some technologies to get through their degrees.

55. UUK suggested that the UKSCQA could support organisations already carrying out work in this area, such as Jisc and QAA, rather than starting a separate strand of work.

56. QAA noted their Academic Integrity Network will be meeting on 16 March where they will be discussing what would be helpful for the sector.

Action

- To consider knowledge curation of work from, e.g., Jisc and QAA.

Item 13: Any Other Business

57. There were no items for AOB.

Item 14: Date of next meeting

58. The next meeting of the UKSCQA will take place between 10am and noon on Wednesday 7 June 2023.

The meeting concluded.
