

Report from the Quality Assessment Committee

Issue

1. The board is kept informed of the work of its Quality Assessment Committee (QAC) by receiving a report on the outcomes of each meeting. The attached report summarises the outcomes of the QAC meeting held on 13 February 2020. This report will be supplemented by an oral report given by the chair of the committee.

Recommendations

2. The board is invited to receive the report of the Quality Assessment Committee.

Further information

3. Available from Simon Levine, chair of the Quality Assessment Committee.

Quality Assessment Committee report

February 2020

The OfS's approach to student outcomes

4. The committee received a presentation updating it on the OfS's developing thinking on its future approach to assessing student outcomes, following its publication in October 2019 on the outcomes of the initial registration process.¹ This publication had noted that the OfS had originally set the baselines for student outcomes at an appropriate and proportionate level for the initial registration process, but that this had been more generous than the OfS's policy intention of ensuring a high quality bar and successful outcomes for all students regardless of their background. The OfS therefore planned to review whether the baselines were set at the appropriate level to protect the interests of students, and would consult with the sector following this review.

Emerging thinking on 'essay mills', or 'contract cheating'

5. The committee received a paper which invited discussion on the OfS's emerging thinking on its approach to 'essay mills' or 'contract cheating', by students studying at registered HE providers. This paper noted that the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment (UKSCQA), of which the OfS is a member, would also be discussing UK-wide and sector-led approaches to 'contract cheating' in late February 2020.
6. The committee separated into small groups to consider the reasons for the use of essay mills, and the reasons why essay mills were felt to pose a risk to students, providers, and HE in general. Members discussed hypothetical reasons for the use of essay mills, discussing internal student factors, factors driven by the provider, and factors that were external to the provider. The committee focused its discussion on the effects of essay mill usage on all students, regardless of whether they engaged in contract cheating, and encouraged the OfS to consider lessons from other regulators that had encountered similar issues.
7. OfS officers thanked the committee for its input, and informed members that its advice would inform the OfS's input to the UKSCQA's planned approach to addressing the use of essay mills. The OfS would also consider the appropriateness of further activity to be undertaken solely by the OfS and would continue to keep the committee updated.

Monitoring of the Designated Quality Body

8. The committee received a paper updating it on the work that Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) had been undertaking as the Designated Quality Body (DQB) and its performance against the Key Performance Measures (KPMs).

9. Exempt from publication.

¹ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/registration-key-themes-and-analysis/>

10. Exempt from publication.
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21. Exempt from publication.
22. Exempt from publication.

Future committee meetings

23. The next meeting will take place on 12 May 2020.