

# Changes to the role of the Quality Assessment Committee

## Issue

1. This paper sets out proposals for a future role for the Quality Assessment Committee (QAC) in providing advice under section 46 of HERA<sup>1</sup> to inform the OfS's decisions about the authorisation, variation, or revocation of degree awarding powers (DAPs), and the changes to the scheme of delegation that are required to achieve this.

## Recommendations

2. The board is invited to:
  - a. Agree that the QAC's role should be expanded on the basis set out in this paper.
  - b. Agree changes to the scheme of delegation to enable this additional function for the QAC (these proposed changes are set out in the annotated copy of the scheme of delegation in Annex A of the chief executive's report, on the agenda for today's meeting).
  - c. If the board agrees to the proposals in this paper, note that the chief executive would be asked to agree changes to the QAC's Rules of Procedure to reflect its expanded role.

## Further information

3. For further information, please contact Jean Arnold, Director of Quality, [jean.arnold@officeforstudents.org.uk](mailto:jean.arnold@officeforstudents.org.uk).

## Discussion

4. Section 46 of HERA sets out that the OfS must request advice from the "relevant body" regarding quality and standards before making, varying or (in certain circumstances) revoking a DAPs order. The "relevant body" means the designated quality body (DQB), or if there is no such body, a committee which the OfS must establish for the purpose of performing the functions of the relevant body. The DQB currently operates its own committee (Advisory Committee for Degree Awarding Powers – ACDAP), in order to give advice on DAPs assessments to the OfS.
5. As we do not expect there to be a DQB from 1 April 2023, HERA therefore requires the OfS to establish its own committee. Section 46 states that the majority of members of such a

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<sup>1</sup> See [Higher Education and Research Act 2017 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk).

committee must not be members of OfS and that the advice provided by the committee must be informed by the views of persons who (between them) have experience of:

- a. providing higher education on behalf of, or being responsible for the provision of higher education by:
    - i. an English higher education provider which is neither authorised to grant taught awards nor authorised to grant research awards,
    - ii. an English further education provider, and
    - iii. an English higher education provider which is within neither sub-paragraph i. or ii.
  - b. representing or promoting the interest of individual students, or students generally, on higher education courses provided by higher education providers,
  - c. employing graduates of higher education courses provided by higher education providers
  - d. research into science, technology, humanities or new ideas, or
  - e. encouraging competition industry or another sector of society.
6. Our recommendation is that the QAC should fulfil the function of providing advice under section 46. The role of the QAC would therefore be extended to include the provision of advice to the OfS on the quality of and standards applied to the higher education being provided by providers for which the OfS is considering granting, varying, or (in certain circumstances) revoking authorisation for degree awarding powers.
7. HERA also sets out a requirement that where a DAPs order authorises a provider to grant research awards, or varies or revokes such an authorisation, the advice provided by the relevant body must also be informed by the views of UKRI. We propose to take a similar approach to that currently in place for Research DAPs cases, with UKRI giving advice (consisting of a short data report) to an assessment team as part of the scrutiny process.
8. We have considered the following factors when making this proposal:
- a. The current role of the QAC is to provide advice to the OfS on the exercise of functions under section 23 of HERA by the DQB and the OfS. This role will necessarily reduce with the proposed de-designation of the DQB. The QAC would therefore have capacity to undertake this new function.
  - b. We consider that it would be more efficient to build on and develop QAC's role in order to fulfil this requirement of HERA, than to establish a new committee. It would be less resource intensive to build on an existing committee rather than constitute and recruit to an entirely new committee.
  - c. We are aware that the sector valued the independent scrutiny that was provided by the function of the QAA's ACDAP in considering DAPs assessments. Our proposed extended function for QAC would ensure that we are maintaining this additional element of independent judgement in the assessment process, which would support robust decision

making by the OfS. It would provide additional independent expert advice during the DAPs assessment process that would maintain its rigour and credibility.

- d. QAC's experience in the OfS's approach to the assessment of quality and standards would be valuable for undertaking this role.
- e. QAC will retain a role in providing advice to the OfS on the exercise of functions under section 23 of HERA. The advice the QAC would provide in relation to DAPs would be fulfilling the function set out under section 46 of HERA, and we do not see a conflict in these responsibilities for the committee.
- f. The current composition and membership of the QAC means that we would not need to undertake extensive recruitment in order to ensure that the membership satisfies the requirements in section 46 for the committee to have particular experience.

### **Operation of the QAC to fulfil section 46 of HERA**

9. The committee's function in regard to DAPs would be to: provide advice to the OfS about the quality of and standards applied to the higher education provided by a provider being considered by the OfS for the grant, variation or (in certain circumstances) revocation of a DAPs authorisation.

10. Exempt from publication.

11. Exempt from publication.

12. The committee would not have responsibility for making decisions about individual DAPs cases. This is consistent with the current arrangements for the QAA's ACDAP. Decision-making arrangements about whether to grant, vary or revoke a DAPs authorisation for a provider will remain as set out in the OfS's scheme of delegation. This means that where the scheme of delegation currently makes provision for the Provider Risk Committee (PRC), the chief executive, or the director of regulation to take DAPs decisions, this would remain the case. The role of the QAC would be to provide advice to inform such decisions.

13. Open recruitment for this committee is already planned for June 2023, and we would need to ensure any new appointments meet the requirements as set out in section 46 of HERA (and listed at paragraph 5 above).

### **Next steps**

14. Should the board agree our proposed approach, this expanded function for the QAC would necessitate amendments to the OfS's scheme of delegation and the current Committee Rules of Procedure.<sup>2</sup> We will also undertake training for members on their new role.

### **Decision required**

15. The Board is asked to agree to the proposed changes to QAC's role and to the scheme of delegation.

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<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/e8280f39-8a47-420b-bfb5-226c8e39bafb/v7-committee-rules-of-procedure-july-2023.pdf>