

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 December 2019. 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.

Quality Assessment Committee report

December 2018

OfS approach to quality and standards

1. OfS staff provided a briefing to the committee on the new approach to quality and standards. In advance of the meeting members had been sent copies of the guidance notes for providers for the Quality and Standards Review (QSR) and Degree Awarding Powers (DAPs) review methods. The briefing provided an overview of the OfS's regulatory framework and the approach of the OfS as a market regulator, providing linkages to the OfS's conditions of registration, the revised Quality Code and the new QSR method.
2. The committee also discussed the linkages between the standards conditions and concerns about grade inflation, and the mechanisms which the OfS would use to understand and, if necessary, intervene where there were unexplained increases in first and upper second class degrees at both the sector and provider level.

Key performance measures for the DQB

3. The committee received a report on the recent key performance measure workshop between the OfS and the QAA. The meeting had been productive, with attendees able to reach agreement about the purpose of the DQB. This had provided a clear focus for discussions about the KPMs, as well as broad categories for the performance measures.
4. The committee agreed that the KPMs should be published to ensure that providers were clear about how the OfS exercised its responsibility for oversight of the DQB and how the DQB's performance was measured. It was noted that the KPMs would focus the QAA on relevant issues and would therefore contribute to the effective performance of the DQB.
5. The committee approved the categories for KPMs as set out in the paper, and asked the OfS staff to finalise the measures with further input from both the QAA senior team and the QAC as required.
6. The committee agreed that having KPMs in place by the end of January 2019 would enable the QAA to use them in its draft annual report to the OfS in February 2019.

QAA's use of reviewers and case studies from different sectors

7. The chair welcomed Douglas Blackstock and Will Naylor to the meeting. Mr Blackstock provided some background and context to the QAA's paper about the pool of reviewers that would be used in the QAA's work as the DQB. He also outlined some of the challenges that the QAA were facing.
8. Mr Blackstock confirmed that a transformation programme had begun which aimed to ensure that the QAA was able to effectively perform the assessment functions in England, alongside its work for the other UK regulators/funders and international customers.

9. Mr Naylor responded to the questions the OfS had provided to the QAA in advance of the meeting. He recognised that the OfS's regulatory framework required a different type of reviewer and he set out the approaches that the QAA was taking to recruitment, training and performance management in this area. The QAC discussed with the QAA officers the tensions that existed between the QAA's need to generate income from providers and its regulatory role as the DQB.
10. The committee agreed that the QAA would be invited to future meetings to provide updates on DQB activities, for example, the fee regime, the reviewer pool and the QAA transformation programme.

DQBs powers to charge fees

11. OfS staff provided an update on the development of QAA's fee charging model for activities undertaken as the Designated Quality Body (DQB). The committee noted that, although providers were keen to learn how much they would be charged for DQB activities, information on fees had not yet been published. The committee noted that officers continued to explore options to resolve this issue.

Future committee meetings

12. The next meeting will take place on 26 February 2019.