

LTC09D134

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From: Forsdick Wendy Ms (ACAD) on behalf of Rhodes Alison Ms (ACAD)
Sent: 28 April 2010 16:30
To: tom.norton@1994group.co.uk
Cc: Evans Robin Mr (ACAD); Rhodes Alison Ms (ACAD); Ward Tom Prof (MTH)
Subject: Academic Infrastructure

Importance: High

Attachments: QAA_acadinfrastr.pdf



QAA_acadinfrastr.p
df (32 KB)

Re: QAA Evaluation of the Academic Infrastructure

Dear Mr. Norton,

On behalf of our Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic), Professor Tom Ward, I attach the University of East Anglia's comments on the current QAA evaluation of the above.

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Alison Rhodes

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QAA EVALUATION OF THE ACADEMIC INFRASTRUCTURE

1a	<p>How widely recognised is the academic infrastructure?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not widely outside the institution (e.g. employers/schools/parents/prospective students); • Some knowledge generally across the institution; • More specialist knowledge resides in LTC/LTQO.
1b	<p>Who should be the audience for the academic infrastructure?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primarily HEIs and in particular, those academic and administrative support staff with responsibilities for academic standards and quality assurance/enhancement; • Students, those entering or about to enter HE and other stakeholders e.g. Schools, employers; • <i>Outcomes</i> of audit are of more relevance to other stakeholders (bullet 2) albeit some reference to the relevant frameworks would be useful. We regard this as potentially helpful in making an appropriate and effective transition from School or employment to HE.
1c	<p>What should be the primary purpose of the academic infrastructure?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a reference tool for use by Heist; • Should be clear as to what is a requirement and what is for guidance only.
1d	<p>Does the academic infrastructure provide an adequate basis for the comparison of academic standards between institutions and between academic disciplines?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A very reserved yes on the basis of the role that the academic infrastructure plays in underpinning the judgements of every institutional audit; but: • Clarify that the issue is comparison of threshold standards - do not stray into area of degree classifications; • Could recognise distinction between research-led/rich/informed and purely teaching institutions (??).

2a	<p>How should the academic infrastructure be better connected to quality assurance and enhancement activities?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affirm that the position of the academic infrastructure with regard to audit and therefore its importance with regard to internal QA/QE activities is reasonably clear for HEIs; • Clarity regarding what are requirements and what is merely guidance would be helpful for HEIs and also for audit teams as they consider their judgements. This clarity would potentially assist equity of treatment and consideration across HEIs. • Otherwise, no change.
2b	<p>What further developments are needed?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reservations regarding extension of Code of Practice to cover areas such as learning resources (albeit recognise that this will be important to students) as these are variable across institutions. Could begin to stray into areas of institutional autonomy.

3a	<p>Have the qualifications frameworks met their original aims, expectations and anticipated benefits?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To some extent (with regard to the FHEQ in England, Wales and Northern Ireland); • Clarity welcomed with regard to locus of MBBS degrees.
3b	<p>Are the ways in which they are currently used appropriate and effective in setting and maintaining standards and quality?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Largely appropriate and effective; • Focus on academic progression has not always been helpful with particular regard to disciplines which have a broad range e.g. environmental sciences; • Concept of discreet levels therefore not always appropriate; • Concept of demonstration of learning outcomes has been useful with regard to Bologna.

3c	<p>What further developments are needed?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reservation with regard to incorporation of credit framework into the FHEQ – too prescriptive; • Reservation regarding extension of qualification descriptors in broad subject discipline categories – too prescriptive.
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4a	<p>Have the subject benchmark statements met their original aims, expectations and anticipated benefits?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To some extent.
4b	<p>Are the ways in which they are currently used appropriate and effective in setting and maintaining standards and quality?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mostly helpful – no indication of great concern amongst academic community.
4c	<p>What further developments are needed?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider position with regard to interdisciplinary and joint programmes; • Avoid any moves to enhance the status of subject benchmarks as a national curriculum; • Retain ownership by the various subject communities; • Retain flexibility in approach i.e. avoid becoming too prescriptive in terms of how a subject benchmark statement should be written. • Ensure compatibility between subject benchmark statements and requirements of programme specification with regard to PSRBs to avoid any tensions.

5a	<p>Have programme specifications met their original aims, expectations and anticipated benefits?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To a limited extent; • Main difficulty arises from primary audience – whether this is for providers or for students; • Challenges exist with regard to version control and changes over
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	<p>time;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal status of programme specification requires clarification; • See last bullet point of 4c above.
5b	<p>Are the ways in which they are currently used appropriate and effective in setting and maintaining standards and quality?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fairly useful; • Now reached a point where almost all courses (or suites of courses) have a programme specification; • Some use as part of a course approvals process and in linking the processes of module, monitoring and update feeding into course review/programme update.
5c	<p>What further developments are needed?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarify primary purpose of programme specification; • Avoid position where institutions have to develop different types of specification for different audiences; • Avoid one-template fits all; continue to allow some flexibility in template.

6a	<p>Has the Code of Practice met its original aims, expectations and anticipated benefits?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Largely; • The “precepts and explanation” approach to clarify the precepts is helpful and reducing opportunities for check list approach is welcome; • Some concern regarding overlaps e.g. Section 2 - Collaborative Provision and Flexible and Distributed Learning and Section 9 – Work-based and Placement Learning, and, to a lesser extent, between Section 4 – External Examining and Section 6 – Assessment of Student.
6b	<p>Are the ways in which it is currently used appropriate and effective in setting and maintaining standards and quality?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Largely effective with particular reference to quality assurance/enhancement; • Revision to take a “precepts and explanation” approach (see above) was a welcome development; • Also welcomed was clarification that it was not necessary or to be

	<p>expected that all members of academic staff at department or school or staff in support services would be familiar with all sections of code of practice. This was a sensible clarification.</p>
6c	<p>What further developments are needed?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider whether sections of code on assessment and external examining might usefully be merged into one (possibly rather long section); • Considerable reservation re. proposed additional sections: teaching and learning methods (many and varied) and learning support resources may stray into issues of institutional autonomy. Note that the Higher Education Achievement Report is not yet a sectoral requirement so avoid temptation to move into areas that are still under discussion; • Agree that the status of European standards and guidelines for quality assurance in Higher Education would usefully be clarified but should not be incorporated as a separate section of the code. This would be too potentially confusing with multiple descriptors of standards and introduces more opportunities for tensions between them. • Clarify where the principle of subsidiarity applies.

7	<p>What do you think the future of the academic infrastructure should be?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scenario 1 preferred (revision and periodic updating of the academic infrastructure); • Scenario 3 viz: substantial reconsideration of the function, purpose and uses of the academic infrastructure not necessary, no clear reason as to why this would be necessary. Strong reservations re. possible new principles of “clarity of process” and the “student voice” without further details of what this might mean; • Avoid greater complexity in the desire to join up everything; • Ensure that there is joined-up thinking between the various bodies considering academic standards and the student experience as between HEFCE, QAA, UUK, BIZ.
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