

SCOTTISH ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CREDIT AND ACCESS

14-02-06
Item 5
Paper 40-07

Paper on the process for self-certification of the framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland against the Framework for the European Higher Education Area

Purpose and recommendation

- 1 This paper sets out the thinking to date about how best to take forward the self-certification of the framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland against the Bologna Framework.
- 2 SACCA is invited to:
 - note the plans to date
 - comment on the issues raised in the paper
 - indicate if there are others issues which the pilot might explore.

Background – the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education Scotland

- 3 The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) is the UK-wide Agency with responsibility for a range of developments and processes concerning the assurance of standards of qualifications and the quality of the learning experience in higher education. QAA has delegated responsibility for its work in Scotland to QAA Scotland Committee and QAA Scotland Office.
- 4 QAA is owned by the representative bodies of higher education in the UK (Universities UK, Universities Scotland, Heads of Higher Education Wales and the Standing Conference of Principals) but has a board with members nominated by a range of constituencies: the funding councils (as agents of the Parliaments) nominate 4 members, the higher education institutions nominate 4 members and there are 6 independent members (i.e not nominated by the sector or the funding council). The Chair of the Board is drawn from the independent members. QAA Scotland Committee has a similar but wider membership with members nominated by the Scottish Funding Council, Universities Scotland, the student sector, employers, professional bodies in Scotland, the college sector, and the Scottish Qualifications Authority. The chair is drawn from the independent members and is currently Charles Munn (CEO Chartered Institute of Bankers in Scotland).

Background – qualifications framework in Scotland

- 5 As part of its work to support the maintenance and assurance of standards, QAA developed and maintains frameworks for qualifications of higher education

institutions. There is one framework for Scotland and one for the rest of the UK. The framework for Scotland is integrated with a wider framework for all learning and qualifications in Scotland (the SCQF) and, unlike the rest of the UK, includes credits (broadly speaking 2 SCQF credit equate to 1 ECTS credit). It is important to note that the SCQF encompasses several frameworks, including the one for higher education, which has its own set of qualifications descriptors, guidelines on nomenclature, guidelines on credit ranges etc. A copy of a document on the framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland is attached.

The Framework and quality assurance

- 6 The Framework provides a key reference point for HEIs in the development and approval of their qualifications and programmes. QAA Codes of Practice for higher education institutions, QAA Institutional Review process and also, in those institutions where it still operates, QAA subject review process each include a focus on the HEIs use of the Framework. HEIs internal reviews are similarly required to review the use of the framework at subject level.
- 7 The Framework for Scotland is the responsibility of QAA Scotland Committee which exercises its responsibility through a sub-committee – the Scottish Advisory Committee on Credit and Access (SACCA). The Framework was developed through a process involving a groups of members drawn from higher education institutions, and wide consultation with higher education institutions, students, professional bodies and employers.
(For member's information – SACCA developed the original concept of the SCQF)
- 8 Members of SACCA are appointed as follows:

Higher education Institutions:	10-12 members
Students:	1 member
Further education	2 members
QAA Scottish Office	1 member
Universities Scotland	1 member
Funding Council	1 member
Scottish Qualification Authority	1 member
Access Fora	1 member
National Access Coordinator	1 member

Proposed arrangements for self-certification

- 9 The Scottish Executive has agreed that it is appropriate for the self-certification should be undertaken through SACCA.
- 10 Ultimate responsibility for the process of self-certification will rest with QAA Scotland and the approval of the process and its outcomes will be the responsibility of the QAA Scotland Committee. The process will be carried out by the Scottish Advisory Committee on Credit and Access which will:

Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
QAA Scotland

- Design the process (for approval by QAA Scotland Committee)
- Oversee the process and receive reports on its progress, addressing any issues that arise during the process

- Receive a final report that a) provides details of the conduct of the process and confirms that the process was run in accordance with the agreed specification and b) provides the outcome of the process including any issues and recommendations requiring to be addressed in relating the HEI framework to the Bologna framework

11 It is proposed that SACCA establishes a small working group which will:

- Be chaired by a member of SACCA
- Have members drawn from higher education institutions and who are a mix of :

a) subject experts i.e. from across disciplines and who have an experience in the design and/or approval/validation of qualifications within higher education
b) students involved in institutional quality assurance systems
c) 'quality assurance experts' i.e. people having responsibility within HEIs for overall management of quality and standards
d) international expert(s)

- Consult with a wider range of stakeholders e.g.:

Higher education institutions
professional bodies in Scotland which operate within higher education
NUS Scotland and Student Associations
A wider range of subject experts (to be defined)

- undertake a mapping of the HEI qualification descriptors against the Bologna cycle descriptors. In doing so the Group will also make use of subject benchmark statements (these apply only to Honours/end of first cycle descriptors).

Issues

12 The proposed approach is based on ultimate authority residing with the national agency responsible not only for the national qualifications framework but also for the assurance of quality and standards. What are the strengths and weakness of this approach?

13 QAA Scotland Committee includes employers as members. Is this sufficient employer involvement in the process of self-certification?

14 Students are members of QAA Scotland, SACCA and the proposed working group, in addition to which the working group will consult with NUS Scotland. Is this an appropriate and sufficient involvement of students in the process of self-certification?

- 15 The proposed process will include the involvement of a range of disciplines/subjects perspectives – either through membership of the Working Group itself, through consultation or through reference to relevant subject benchmark statements. Is the involvement of subjects/disciplines necessary and appropriate?
- 16 The proposed process will involve international expertise. This could be through one or more people from the Bologna countries and or from countries in other parts of the world and having experience in the development of national qualifications frameworks. How many individuals should the self-certification process involve and from what range of countries?
- 17 The process is ultimately one of peer judgment: using a mix of subjects experts, quality assurance experts and students and focusing on the correlation of the Scottish qualification descriptors and associated subject descriptors against the Bologna descriptors.