



Universities UK

Beyond the honours degree classification

The Burgess Group final report



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Burgess Group Final Report

October 2007

Direction and Diversity
in Higher Education



Contents

Chair's foreword	5
Executive summary	7
Part 1: Introduction and background	11
Introduction	11
Methodology	11
Context	13
The honours degree	14
The honours degree classification	14
Progress Files	15
European Diploma Supplement	16
Criteria	17
Part 2: The need for change	19
Factors driving change	19
Policy promoting change	19
A transformed higher education experience	20
A rapidly changing labour market	22
The 'essential 2(i)'	23
Developing institutional practice	25
The honours degree classification – conclusions	28
Part 3: Options for change	29
Overview	29
Models	29
Grade point average	29
Summative scale	30
Alternative summative systems and scales – conclusions	31
Part 4: Proposals and next steps	34
Proposals for change	34
The Higher Education Achievement Report	35
Development phase	38
Developing the Higher Education Achievement Report	38
Students and employers	41
Guide to using the Higher Education Achievement Report	42
Assessment practice	42
Conclusions	43

Appendix	Acronyms and Glossary	44
Annex A	Scoping Group recommendations, made in 2004	50
Annex B	Terms of reference and membership of the Steering Group	51
Annex C	Methodology	54
Annex D	The honours degree	56
Annex E	Model to form basis of Higher Education Achievement Report	57
Annex F	References	67
Notes		75

Chair's foreword

This is the third, and final, report on the work that I have led on measuring and recording student achievement. It is published at the end of a series of presentations, discussions and consultations, which began with the work of the original Scoping Group in 2004 and which has been brought to a conclusion by the Steering Group.

The diagnosis presented by the Scoping Group was simple – and one with which we swiftly concurred – the UK honours degree is a robust and highly-valued qualification but the honours degree classification system is no longer fit for purpose. It cannot describe, and therefore does not do full justice to, the range of knowledge, skills, experience and attributes of a graduate in the 21st century. Exploring how to reform or replace the classification system has not been easy. We have conducted extensive work to develop a practical set of proposals upon which we are all agreed.

Like the Scoping Group before us, we have found the UK honours degree classification system wanting. We considered different forms of summative scale – shorter and longer – but the challenges we have identified are associated with any form of summative judgement. By this phrase summative judgement we mean the overall judgement made about a student's performance. For an honours degree in the UK higher education system, this is usually expressed in the form of First, Upper Second, Lower Second, Third, Pass or Fail. The evidence is conclusive that, while it endures, it will actively inhibit the use of wider information.

The persistence of a system that concentrates on a single summative judgement results in a fixation on achieving a number that is considered 'good'. This drives the behaviour of academic staff and students and works to the detriment of the currency of other information. When they leave university, graduates deserve more than a single number to sum up their achievements. We have concluded that this wider information could be conveyed through the European Diploma Supplement and an expanded academic transcript.

We recommend developing what we are calling, at least in the interim, a Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR) as the key vehicle for measuring and recording student achievement. The HEAR will need to be considered and developed by the sector and tested with other groups that have an interest in this – particularly students and employers. Our approach is to develop a reporting system that proves itself by realising a wide range of opportunities without destabilising the existing system.

Our proposals have been carefully constructed to build upon existing developments and, in practice, largely involve accelerating existing trends. We have identified a clear destination point of academic year 2010/11, by which time the HEAR should be in place most likely alongside the existing honours degree classification system.

Our report is addressed to higher education institutions, but it has the needs of students, employers and society at its heart. We urge the UK higher education sector to take up the challenge to build and implement a sustainable system for recording achievement that is fit for purpose in the 21st century.

In commending our report to the sector I would like to thank all those within and beyond higher education who responded to our consultations. We have listened to your suggestions and tried to use them in framing our report. In particular, I would also like to thank the members of the committee and the observers who have given generously of their time. Finally, my thanks go to the secretariat and in particular to Jane Denholm at Critical Thinking, who has patiently produced numerous drafts and helped to shape the recommendations that have arisen out of the committee's stimulating discussions and debates about assessment and degree classification.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bob Burgess'.

Professor Robert Burgess

Vice-Chancellor, University of Leicester

Chair, Measuring and Recording Student Achievement Steering Group

October 2007

Executive summary

Introduction

The UK honours degree is a robust and highly-valued qualification. It is the core product of the UK higher education system. This report considers the honours degree classification system, which measures a student's performance on an undergraduate honours degree programme. All UK higher education institutions use the same classification nomenclature which is almost universally applied to honours degrees.

Issues of how best to assess, calculate, record and present student achievement receive continuous attention by UK higher education institutions both individually and collectively. In 2004, the first Burgess Report – the report of the Measuring and Recording Student Achievement Scoping Group – established the case for fundamentally reviewing the current system for classifying UK honours degrees, which it considered was no longer fit for purpose. A Measuring and Recording Student Achievement Steering Group was established in February 2005 to consider, develop and consult on practical proposals for the implementation of the Scoping Group's recommendations. Over the past two years the Steering Group has undertaken a detailed consideration of the issues, which it is now presenting to the sector in the form of this report.

Case for change

A range of related and highly compelling factors have converged to make the case for change inevitable, and indeed, long overdue. These include the general direction of higher education policy and an increasing emphasis on widening participation and skills, the transformation of the higher education experience, changes to the labour market, student perceptions of what constitutes a 'worthwhile' degree and institutional practice. In particular the Steering Group was convinced that:

- A summative system, which gives the appearance of 'signing-off' a person's education with a simple numerical indicator, is at odds with lifelong learning. It encourages students and employers to focus on one final outcome and perceived 'end point', rather than opening them to the concept of a range of different types and levels of achievement, which are each part of an ongoing process of learning that will continue beyond the attainment of their degree.
- There is a need to do justice to the full range of student experience by allowing a wider recognition of achievement.
- The higher education sector has been transformed out of all recognition from that which gave rise to the traditional honours degree classification mechanism, which was devised for a traditional concept of higher education.

- The present system cannot capture achievement in some key areas of interest to students and employers and many employers could be missing out on the skills and experience of potential recruits merely because these students had not attained a First/Upper Second.
- The focus on the top two degree classes wrongly reinforces an impression that a Lower Second or a Third Class degree is not an achievement when, in fact students with such degrees have met the standard required for honours degree level, graduate qualifications.
- Institutional methods for calculating the degree classification could be clearer in order to help students' understanding of what they are being awarded and what is being recognised by the institution.
- The means of representing student achievement should be radically reformed – ideally to replace the summative judgement with a more detailed set of information.

Options for change

Replacing the current honours degree classification system represents a major upheaval for the sector and other stakeholders and the Steering Group insisted that there must be clear, and clearly understood, benefits at the root of any change it proposed. The Group consulted the sector on the possibility of using either a shortened or a lengthened scale of degree classification. Neither stakeholders generally, nor the sector itself, coalesced around a particular approach. On the whole, respondents tended to suggest changes within the current system rather than considering a new system. This reinforced the Group's resolve to ensure that its proposals should build on existing practice that the sector could develop.

The Steering Group considered at length whether some form of overall summative judgement needed to be retained at all. Most other countries currently seem to accept the need for simple and straightforward summative information relating to a student's overall achievements but the Steering Group was unable to find among those systems a suitable alternative to the honours classification. It concluded that the summative judgement itself is the problem.

Summative judgement thresholds distract and detract from information which conveys a fuller understanding of the skills and knowledge bases acquired by the student. The Steering Group concluded that, ideally, the summative judgement should be replaced with a more sophisticated approach that better represents the outcomes of student learning and encouraged personal development and understanding in the context of lifelong learning. The Group believed there was a need for greater emphasis on the additional information currently contained in the European Diploma Supplement and academic transcript. If these were combined, and incorporated a more broadly-conceived and more detailed version of the academic transcript, they could form the basis for a better approach. By academic transcript we mean an authoritative and official record of a learner's programme of study, the grades they have achieved and the credit they have gained.

A key conclusion that the Steering Group drew from its work was that establishing a replacement system for the current honours degree classification would be fraught with critical dangers that should be explored, and tested in more detail before any radical change was made. It therefore recommends a stage of detailed exploration, development and testing to be carried out in parallel with the existing honours degree classification system over the next four years.

Proposals

The Steering Group proposes that:

- By academic year 2010/11, following a period of detailed development, a Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR) will be the central vehicle for recording all university-level undergraduate higher education student achievement in all UK higher education institutions.
- The HEAR will be a single document, based on, and developed from, the current academic transcript, and incorporating the European Diploma Supplement. It will contain a wider range of information than the current academic transcript and will capture more fully than now the strengths and weaknesses of the student's performance. It will also contain information about academic credit, which will link directly to the national credit framework for the part of the UK in which the award is made. Core content will be common to all institutions, which will be free to add additional information as they see fit.
- The HEAR will contain information which the institution is prepared to verify. Further work should be done on how to measure and record skills and achievements gained through non-formal learning but this, along with other student-generated/driven information, should be part of Personal Development Planning (PDP).

- In the short/medium term, the HEAR will also continue to contain an overall summative judgement, verified by the institution. During this period it is likely that this will remain the existing honours degree classification but we anticipate that alternatives might develop as the information available in the HEAR becomes richer.
- In parallel, the UK higher education sector will have considered, debated and resolved a range of key issues and principles relating to assessment. The outcomes, in turn, will feed into the development of the content of the HEAR.

These proposals should be implemented in stages and following detailed exploration in a number of areas that address and resolve the key issues identified in the Steering Group's report.

Our proposals have been firmly, and deliberately, rooted in current developments and build on existing practice. The Steering Group intends that they will ensure that the UK higher education sector will be well-positioned to meet the demands of the future. The proposals contain a transitional, exploratory stage during which all stakeholders will be actively involved in developing a new system. This will require action, support and cooperation by higher education institutions, the National Union of Students (NUS) and students' associations, employers' organisations, the UK higher education funding bodies and a range of sector support and development agencies, including the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), Higher Education Academy (HEA) and the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC).

The proposed timetable for implementation allows institutions to develop the HEAR in parallel with the honours degree classification, or other summative judgements. The Steering Group designed this process intentionally so that, as the work progresses, and the HEAR becomes established, the benefits in terms of the richness of the information it yields about each individual student will increasingly come to be acknowledged and understood. As a consequence, the Steering Group believes the existing degree classification will decline in importance until it should no longer be considered necessary although it could not and did not assume this would be so.

Part 1: Introduction and background

Introduction

1. This report has been prepared by the Measuring and Recording Student Achievement Steering Group – the ‘Burgess Group’ – for the UK higher education sector.
2. The sector, and some notable groups within it, have for decades been considering how to assess, calculate, record and present student achievement. When the English higher education sector was first invited by the 2003 White Paper *The Future of Higher Education* to consider the provision of information about student achievement and the honours degree classification, Universities UK (UUK) and GuildHE (then the Standing Conference of Principals), supported by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), established a Scoping Group to consider whether there was merit in change and in investigating alternatives. It was agreed early on that, although the White Paper relates to England only, the issue of measuring and recording student achievement is of interest UK-wide; colleagues from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland were invited to participate in the work of the Group. The Scoping Group reported in November 2004 with a number of recommendations for future action¹. These are reprinted at Annex A.
3. The Scoping Group established that there was a case for change and a Measuring and Recording Student Achievement Steering Group (the Steering Group) was established in February 2005 to consider, develop and consult on practical proposals for the implementation of the Scoping Group’s recommendations. Steering Group membership was drawn from across the UK. The current degree classification system is UK-wide and we consider that the new approach we are proposing to augment (and potentially replace it) should also be UK-wide. Membership and terms of reference for the Steering Group are at Annex B. Over the past three years the Steering Group has undertaken a detailed consideration of the issues which we are now presenting to the sector in the form of this report.

Methodology

4. The Steering Group has met 18 times. The original Scoping Group had developed and followed a set of principles to guide its activities. At its first meeting the Steering Group endorsed these principles and resolved that they would underpin its work. The principles, which were adapted and augmented for this purpose are:
 - to ensure that the interests of students are a primary concern of all aspects of the Group’s work;
 - to respect institutional autonomy and academic professionalism;

- to ensure that proposals are, as far as possible, 'owned' by the sector via effective communication and consultation;
 - to propose change which has general support, even if a significant minority of institutions are opposed to it;
 - not to shy away from suggesting radical change if this is the consensus of the Group;
 - to ensure clarity about the problems we are trying to address/opportunities we are trying to exploit or create;
 - to ensure that proposals are, as far as possible, evidence-based through reviewing previous work as well as commissioning further research and highlighting examples of good practice;
 - at all times to be concerned about the possible burden of recommendations on institutions and staff;
 - proposals should, where possible, go with the grain of existing developments; and
 - proposals must be seen to be useful by the sector and contain practical examples to show they are workable.
5. At that first meeting the Steering Group officially received the report of the Scoping Group and gave consideration to its recommendations. The way that information on student achievement is recorded and, in particular, the future of the honours degree classification, alongside credit, was highlighted as one of two main themes for further work.
 6. Our work on degree classification has been informed by a wide range of evidence and views. This includes the existing and extensive range of academic articles, including work on assessment practice and systems, and reports prepared for the original Scoping Group.
 7. We also commissioned further evidence from a range of sources on assessment practices and regulations and means and methods of recording different types of achievement in the UK and abroad, including Personal Development Planning, approaches to the transcript and the Diploma Supplement. A full list of references is at Annex F.

8. We supplemented this material through discussions with a broad range of stakeholder groups having an interest in the provision of degree information in the UK². In addition, we also:
- carried out two written consultation exercises – in two stages – with the sector and with a wider group of stakeholders;
 - held five consultation conferences around the UK to explain, discuss and debate the issues and our developing conclusions;
 - conducted a series of meetings and focus groups with both small and medium sized employers and large recruiters of graduates to find out about their selection practices and seek their views and advice on potential changes to the way that degree information is provided;
 - influenced the questions in a major HEFCE-funded study being carried out by the University of Sussex School of Education which was designed to investigate, among other things, employer needs for information about student achievement;³
 - commissioned a *Guide to the Diploma Supplement* from the UK HE Europe Unit;
 - met with a wide range of sector officers' groups including Pro Vice-Chancellors for Learning and Teaching, Academic Registrars, the Higher Education Regulation Review Group, and Student Record Officers. External groups included the Association of Graduate Recruiters.
9. Fuller details of our methodology are at Annex C.

Context

10. As a lifelong learning culture⁴ increasingly begins to take root within UK higher education, a range of supporting initiatives have developed, which have a bearing on the issues that we have been considering. A general glossary of terms we use is in the Appendix. For ease of reference key terms and concepts used throughout this report are summarised in this section below. They are the honours degree, the honours degree classification, the Progress File – incorporating the academic transcript and Personal Development Planning (PDP) – and the European Diploma Supplement (DS).

The honours degree

11. The honours degree (technically the Bachelors degree with honours) is a robust and highly-valued qualification. It is the core product of the UK higher education system. Honours degree graduates will have acquired understanding of a complex body of knowledge, a wide range of high-level skills and a broad level of experience. A summary of the qualities possessed by an honours degree graduate is contained in nationally agreed 'qualification descriptors' within the higher education framework of qualifications and more detail is provided at Annex D⁵.

The honours degree classification

12. This report is about the honours degree *classification system*, which provides a summary of a student's performance on an undergraduate honours degree programme. All UK higher education institutions use the same classification nomenclature, which is almost universally applied to honours degrees (with some exceptions such as medical degrees). There are potentially a maximum of six points on the scale. Above the Fail grade institutions award a First, Upper Second, Lower Second and Third Class degree. Institutions may also award a 'Pass' grade which does not carry honours. This system has been in existence for around 200 years and was first introduced in Oxford at the beginning of the 19th century, at a time when only a small minority of students were studying for honours. We have come to appreciate many of the reasons why this system has endured and, in making proposals for change, we acknowledge this longevity.
13. We are aware that concerns raised about the honours degree classification system are open to exaggeration and misinterpretation by those who seek dramatic headlines and infer signs of a drop in standards in UK higher education. This is neither our intention nor our conclusion. We do not doubt the very high standard and value of the UK higher education experience evidenced most recently, for example, by the results of the National Student Survey and completion/employment rates relative to higher education elsewhere in the world. Our energies have been focused on issues of whether the diverse and complex achievements of honours graduates can be appropriately summarised and represented by a single judgement or number, drawn from a small classificatory scale.

Progress files

14. The higher education Progress File was first proposed by the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education – the Dearing Report – in 1997. The Progress File was conceived as a set of materials and documents, to be held and maintained by the student, containing a record of their achievements⁶. Designed to fit with developing practice among school pupils, the Progress File would contain both informal information about skills and experience and formal achievement, this latter information to be assessed and verified by the higher education institution as its contribution to the Progress File. The introduction of the Progress File aimed to help make the outcomes, or results, of learning in higher education more explicit, identify the achievements of learning, and support the concept that learning is a lifetime activity, that is, that the honours degree is only one part of a long journey of learning. Dearing proposed that the Progress File comprise two distinct elements: an official **academic transcript** provided by the institution and a collection of information owned and managed by the student, subsequently entitled **Personal Development Planning (PDP)**. In practice, whereas the academic transcript has been taken up in some form by all higher education institutions, PDP, and the Progress File itself, have been less widely-adopted. Our proposals have been designed to work with the grain of the successes of these existing initiatives.
 - Since the early years of this decade, all UK higher education institutions have offered students an **academic transcript**. This contains more detailed information about the components of learning and achievement that in turn contribute to the overall qualification and specifically provides a more detailed record of achievement at individual module level. The transcript is signed off by the awarding institution. The transcript should link to data about both preceding and possible subsequent qualifications in a seamless progression of information. Although all graduates now receive an academic transcript, the emphasis on the honours classification attained – the single summative judgement – as a means of differentiating student achievement, has endured. Our proposals are centred on the current academic transcript in the form of a new Higher Education Achievement Report, HEAR, which will supplement and could potentially replace the honours degree classification system. Subsequent references in this report to a ‘transcript’ refer to the existing one and references to a HEAR to our proposed new version; and

- **Personal Development Planning (PDP)** is a means of engaging students in reviewing, reflecting upon and representing their own learning. Students are able to draw upon such reviews and related records to create customised information about their learning and achievement, including, where appropriate, the softer skills they have acquired. They can then communicate this information to different audiences with different needs and interests. This information is not generally verified or signed off by the institution, though some institutions do offer certification for additional/extra-curricular awards, which employ the 'plan-do-review' approach characteristic of PDP. The Centre for Recording Achievement, on behalf of the higher education sector, is leading work for the Higher Education Academy to support the effective implementation of PDP and related e-portfolio practice.
15. Guidelines for higher education Progress Files anticipated the widespread introduction of the transcript by 2002/2003 and the PDP element to be operational for all higher education awards, across the whole higher education sector, by 2005/06. The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and the original signatories to the policy have made a commitment to review and revise, where appropriate, the Guidelines for HE Progress Files to reflect progress made and to continue to support institutions in implementing their policies. Good progress has been made towards introducing transcripts and implementing PDP policies by UK higher education institutions.

European Diploma Supplement

16. In addition to academic transcripts, many UK higher education institutions are also currently introducing the European Diploma Supplement (DS) required under the Bologna process by 2005 (the 2003 Berlin Communiqué from the Conference of Ministers responsible for higher education stated that every student graduating from 2005 should receive the Diploma Supplement automatically and free of charge). The DS is one of the main tools of the Council of Europe's *Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education in the European Region*, which was ratified by the UK in 2003 and came into force the following July. All 46 Bologna Process countries are moving towards implementation.

17. As awareness and participation in the Bologna process increases among UK higher education institutions, it is likely that all institutions will introduce the DS sooner, rather than later, therefore any record of student achievement will be seen in association with a DS. The DS aims to describe the qualification in an easily understandable way and relate it to the higher education system within which it was issued. It is designed to provide a description of the nature, level, context, content and status of the studies that were pursued and successfully completed by the individual named on the original qualification to which the supplement is appended. Our work shows that there is substantive overlap between the existing UK transcript specification and the DS information requirements. Many UK institutions have adapted, or are in the process of adapting, their transcripts to meet the requirements of the DS specification. We acknowledge this and our proposals build upon this base.

Criteria

18. The Scoping Group report, published in 2004 had identified a range of key criteria that would characterise an ideal classification system and against which any new approach or system should be considered⁷. The Steering Group agreed that these criteria continue to have validity and accepted them with some small changes. The criteria are:
- **acceptability:** should be acceptable to all stakeholders;
 - **administrative efficiency:** the process should be as efficient as possible and not increase the administrative burden on staff;
 - **equity/fairness:** similar levels of performance should be recorded in a similar way;
 - **information:** should provide appropriate information to meet a range of different needs;
 - **motivation:** should encourage learners to achieve their full potential;
 - **reliability/consistency:** should produce reliable and consistent results regardless of time, subject or institution;
 - **simplicity:** should be as simple as possible for stakeholders, particularly external stakeholders, to understand;
 - **transparency:** the record of how the learner's achievement is arrived at should be clear and transparent to all stakeholders;

- **validity:** should be robust and credible in academic terms; and
 - **verification:** should be verifiable.
19. This list provides a framework for considering the issues. Of course, no single system will be able to meet fully all of these criteria, not all of which are compatible. Nor will different stakeholders give each criterion equal weight. Tensions between the different criteria include, for example, the need to ensure that the system meets the information needs of a wide range of stakeholders, at the same time as being simple and administratively efficient. Our consultation exercises reinforced, however, that stakeholders share our commitment to these criteria and that academic staff in particular, view some of these criteria as core academic values.
20. In determining which criteria to emphasise, the Steering Group has been particularly mindful of the views and needs of the student whose performance and achievement is being assessed and described. Students require a system that they can understand and that is seen to be fair. The need for student achievement to be accurately and fairly recognised, regardless of the subject, institution, subject culture or assessment process makes transparency, validity and fairness especially important criteria. The Steering Group has borne this in mind in making an assessment of the current honours degree classification system and the different options available for measuring and recording student achievement.

Part 2: The need for change

Factors driving change

21. A range of different, and often related, factors have converged to make change inevitable, indeed, we think, overdue. These include the general direction of policy, the transformation of the higher education experience, changes to the labour market, student perceptions of what constitutes a 'worthwhile' degree classification and institutional practice. We consider each of these below.

Policy promoting change

22. In raising questions about the existing honours degree classification system, the English White Paper acknowledged that an alternative system might be desirable⁸. Ten years ago the Dearing Report recorded that, "the evidence we received showed a large minority view, more marked among employers, that the honours classification system had outlived its usefulness" (Dearing 1997: p139)⁹. Dearing stopped short of recommending its abolition but proposed a Progress File, to which both the student and their higher education institution would contribute as a supplement to the summative judgement. Dearing's hope was that, quite naturally, as the Progress File's usefulness became confirmed, "the present classification system may become increasingly redundant" (Dearing 1997: p140)¹⁰. But it has not.
23. In 2004 the Burgess Scoping Group concurred that "revision of the [honours] degree classification system is perceived by many as an essential form of modernisation of the higher education sector" (UniversitiesUK 2004, p18)¹¹. Having considered the existing system in some depth as part of the scoping exercise, the Scoping Group concluded that "so much has moved on in higher education over the past decade or so, in terms of significant and comprehensive pedagogic developments, that the relationship of the degree classification system to the curriculum and the student experience is now akin to the tail wagging the dog" (UniversitiesUK 2004, p18)¹². The Scoping Group's report declared that "the current system of degree classification is not sufficiently 'fit for purpose'" (UniversitiesUK 2004, p19)¹³ and recommended that the sector take forward a consideration of alternative options with a view to arriving at a replacement for the current system. University vice-chancellors and principals discussed the issues arising in the report in workshops at the Universities UK Main Committee in December 2004, where there was strong and widespread agreement that the case for change was considerable and that further work should be done to identify an alternative system.

24. The Steering Group, charged with taking this work forward, considered the evidence and opinions amassed by the Scoping Group and agreed that there was a case for a major review of the arrangements for classification of the honours degree. The Steering Group commissioned its own evidence as well as seeking the views of the many stakeholder groups who would be likely to be affected by any changes. After considerable discussion and reflection, we concur with the Scoping Group's conclusion, namely that the current system of classification is no longer fit for purpose. As our subsequent work has found, the shortcomings of the honours degree classification apply to any summative system. **We conclude that a summative system, such as the honours degree classification, which gives the appearance of 'signing-off' a person's education with a simple numerical indicator, is at odds with lifelong learning. In seeking to assist the sector in positioning itself to meet the needs of future students, we have sought to develop a better approach.** Our evidence for this is discussed in the paragraphs below.

A transformed higher education experience

25. In 1997 the Dearing Report predicted that, "in the next century, the economically successful nations will be those which become learning societies: where all are committed, through effective education and training, to lifelong learning" (Dearing 1997, p7)¹⁴. Dearing acknowledged significant advances since the report in 1963 by the Robbins Committee on Higher Education¹⁵ but declared that "higher education will need to continue to adapt to the needs of a rapidly changing world and to new challenges" (Dearing 1997, p11)¹⁶. These included the need to increase numbers and widen participation in higher education¹⁷ and for institutions to do more to develop a range of key skills in students, "in addition to the cognitive capabilities traditionally associated with higher education"(Dearing 1997, p34)¹⁸. Work on widening participation has since become a mainstream activity. In addition, subsequent reviews have more fully articulated the details of a 'skills agenda' within the UK. Most recently, the Leitch Report called for increased workplace and higher-level skills development with consequent implications for the work of the higher education sector¹⁹. In 2007 the UK has a mass higher education system that is heterogeneous and responsible for educating a diverse student body for a wide range of destinations. Crucially, as Watson has recently pointed out, it is also now embedded within a lifelong learning system and fully connected to the other education sectors²⁰.

26. Against this backdrop, changes to learning, teaching and assessment in higher education institutions, as well as in other sectors, have been substantial. Many developments, both strategic and practical, have taken place and these include the adoption of practices such as modularisation, increased opportunities for part-time study, more flexible conceptions of higher education curriculum structures and definitions of knowledge, the award and use of credit and the development of credit systems²¹, work-based learning, the accreditation of prior experiential learning and assessment by coursework as well as by new and different forms of examination.
27. All of this has given rise to a dramatic increase in the diversity of assessment practices, beyond the traditional examinations at the end of a year, or years, of study, and is designed to capture a wider range of student achievement in greater depth. Assessment is increasingly complicated with much more use of continuous assessment and assessment of achievements and progress where the criteria and the mark distributions are both very different from conventional examinations (such as projects, dissertations, shows and performance). Increasingly different types of achievements are being assessed – involving for example both knowledge and skills – which simply cannot be added together in a meaningful way. **The Steering Group concluded that there is a need to do justice to this wide range of experience by allowing a wider recognition of achievement instead of spending considerable time and effort attempting to fit these into a single summative judgement.**
28. When assessment outcomes are reduced to a single summative scale, a rich seam of information about achievement is simply wasted. Whatever people thought about the need for a summative classification element, many felt that here is a need to consider enhancing the information made available to students, employers and other stakeholders about achievement. Specifically related to this, as recorded earlier, under the Bologna process, the European ministers for higher education agreed that, from 2005, every graduate should automatically receive the European Diploma Supplement (DS). The ministers' aim is that institutions and employers will "make full use of the Diploma Supplement, so as to take advantage of the improved transparency and flexibility of the higher education degree systems, for fostering employability and facilitating academic recognition for further studies" (Conference of Ministers responsible for Higher Education 2003, p5)²². In written evidence to the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee Inquiry on the Bologna Process in 2006, the National Union of Students expressed support for the DS as a tool for making it easier to compare qualifications gained in HE systems across Europe, facilitating recognition of UK qualifications and leading to greater mobility. The NUS evidence called explicitly for our Group to incorporate the DS as an essential component of measuring and recording student achievement.

29. **The Steering Group concluded that the higher education sector has been transformed out of all recognition from that which gave rise to the traditional honours degree classification system.** This system was devised for, and is best suited to, a traditional concept of higher education – principally a small, elite system involving full-time study and a ‘big bang’ diet of final examinations as the main or only assessment method, and with a three/four year undergraduate degree as the main outcome.

A rapidly changing labour market

30. Changes to the labour market have resulted in a degree increasingly becoming a minimum expectation for a wider range of occupations. Although there are questions about the predictive value of the degree classification attained once graduates enter employment, many employers sift initially on the basis of the degree classification. Research we considered showed that more than half the employers in the sample were satisfied with the current system of degree classification commenting that the system is “widely understood and trusted” (University of Sussex School of Education 2006, p20)²³. Research also found some employers who do not sift by degree category – both for wider business reasons and often also in the interests of ensuring equal opportunities, because attracting a wider range of applications can help ensure employees represent a more diverse base²⁴.
31. Our research found, unsurprisingly, that many employers use the degree classification because they need to sift large numbers of applicants. In addition, some appear to use the Upper Second as a cut-off point because they can attract highly qualified graduates, rather than because of an actual need for the most highly qualified graduates²⁵. Employers, however, have a variety of needs and requirements. Their recruitment policies and practices vary widely and how much they currently already value the degree classification, compared to other factors, varies also. Research we commissioned into the practices of large graduate recruiters found that a significant minority of employers are already using means other than the degree classification to sift large numbers of applicants, concluding that “it is possible, although the practice is not widespread, to recruit from large numbers without making use of the degree classification information” (Denholm 2006b, p 4)²⁶. Some employers are also making some use of the current academic transcript. **The Steering Group concluded that many employers could be missing out on the skills and experience of potential recruits because these graduates had not attained a First/Upper Second.** A different approach could assist such employers to reconsider their recruitment practices.

32. Even those employers that use the current degree classification to make an initial sift of applications report that they still need to further differentiate between graduates. Once at the shortlisting stage, the research we commissioned found that, “the values placed on interpersonal and communications skills increased” while the “significance of academic achievement went down at interview”(Morley L, et al. 2006, p14)²⁷. These skills are assessed by considering work experience and proof of the sorts of dispositions highly valued by employers including “motivation, flexibility, risk-taking, the ability to cope with change, a problem-solving approach and initiative” (Morley L, et al. 2006, p15)²⁸. While it is not impossible for students to acquire such qualities through academic study, a single summative degree classification yields nothing about such talents, which are often not to do with academic prowess. In addition, our research showed that employers have a major concern that many graduates cannot effectively articulate their experiences and achievements and their relevance to the post for which they are applying. Although generally unfamiliar with academic transcripts, there is interest and some support from employers in this method of recording achievement, although they would welcome guidance in their use in small and medium sized enterprises²⁹.
33. **The Steering Group concluded that the present system cannot capture information about achievement in some key areas of interest to employers.** Although it will never be appropriate for institutions to attempt to measure and sign off on certain types of information (student timekeeping, for example), it is worth the sector investigating whether it is possible to augment the current academic transcript with additional information.

The ‘essential 2(i)’

34. These employer practices, described above, combined with the expansion of higher education, and an increasingly competitive environment caused by the increase in graduate numbers, has also resulted in student perceptions that they need “the essential 2(i)” to be even considered by employers³⁰. Attaining at least an Upper Second, therefore, has for many students become the focus of the exercise – evidenced by the increasing number of appeals by borderline cases and supported by the Career Services Unit’s well-established, longitudinal survey research into the hopes of final-year students and experiences of new graduates³¹. The widespread perceived need for a First or Upper Second class honours degree has been matched by a steady increase in the proportion of students at UK higher education institutions attaining this outcome. As Figure 2 shows, almost 60 per cent of new graduates in 2005/06 received First or Upper Second class degrees. Our research showed that the proportion of such degrees rose in almost all subject areas between 1994 and 2002³².

Figure 1: Number of First degree students obtaining degrees with grade awarded – 1994/95 to 2005/06

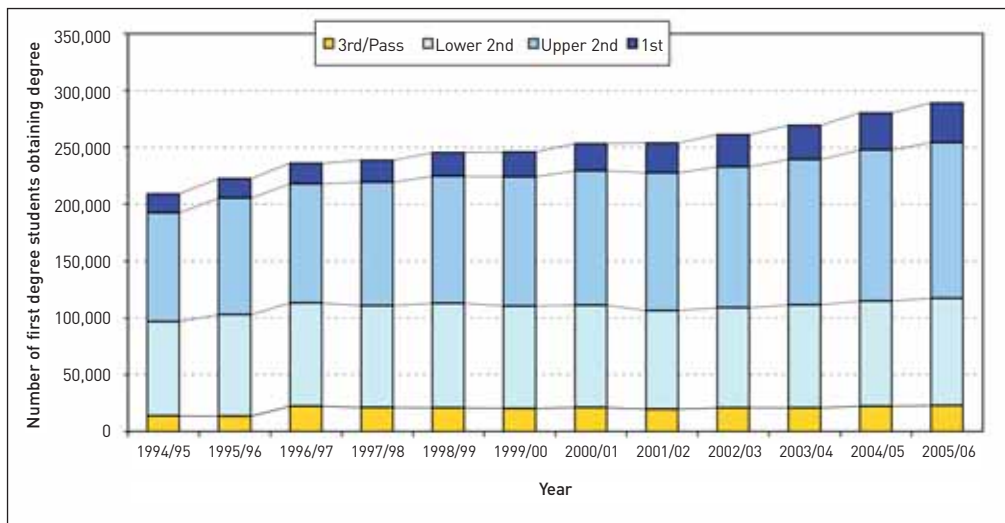


Figure 1: Source UUK/HESA 2007

Figure 2: Proportion of First degree students obtaining First or Upper Second honours degrees – 1994/95 to 2005/06

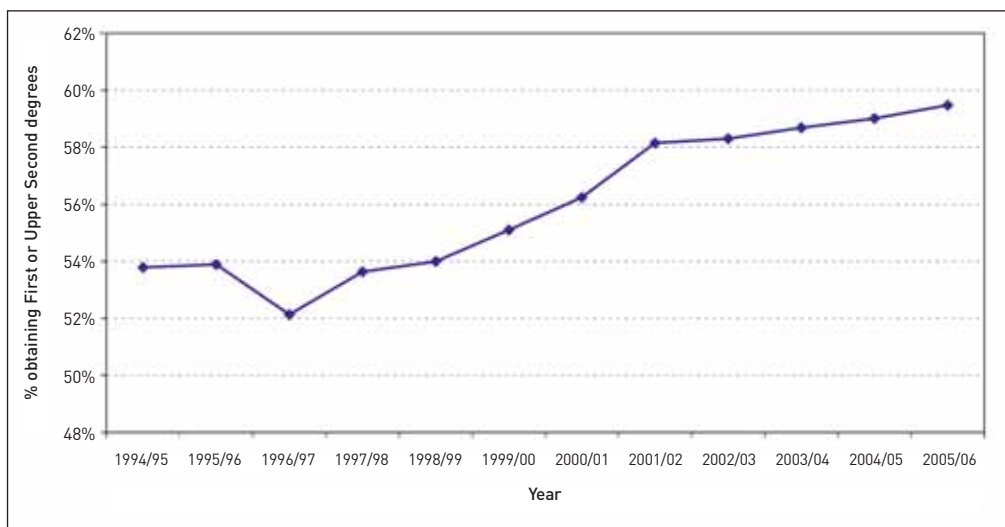


Figure 2: Source UUK/HESA 2007

35. The 2003 White Paper for England had encouraged work on the classification system “particularly given the increasing numbers of first and upper second class degrees being awarded” (DfES 2003, p49)³³. The reasons for this increase are complex and the Group is acutely aware that some commentators consider undesirable ‘grade inflation’ to be in operation. In such circumstances, arguably less relevant factors, such as the perceived reputation of the university where the degree was obtained, are likely to become increasingly significant. We have deliberately not engaged with debates about whether this is a real, or simply perceived, phenomenon. We think that the obsession with the top two degree classes is unhealthy and damaging. It reinforces an erroneous impression that a Lower Second or a Third class honours degree is not an achievement, when in fact the student has met the standard to receive an honours degree level qualification. Students can, and do, fail to achieve an honours degree and the system is supported by rigorous and explicit benchmark standards. We have concluded that the only way this situation can be halted, however, is if the means of representing student achievement is fundamentally reformed. **We concluded that the perceived need for ‘the essential 2(i)’ is misplaced and at odds with the idea of a lifelong learning culture as it encourages students and employers to focus on one final outcome and perceived ‘end point’, rather than conceiving a range of different types and levels of achievement which are part of an ongoing process of learning that will continue beyond the attainment of a first degree.**

Developing institutional practice

36. The UK higher education sector comprises a large number of autonomous institutions, themselves comprising a wide range of component departments. Variation in assessment and marking practice and arrangements are, therefore, inevitable, and in many cases, both necessary and warranted. The manifestations of this autonomy, however, have practical implications for the accuracy which can be claimed for the honours degree classification across UK higher education as a whole. A growing number of studies support Yorke’s conclusion that “the honours degree classification is less reliable than many believe” (Yorke, THES 2007, p2)³⁴. A range of studies have raised concerns about the technicalities of the myriad different processes for arriving at the classification and the accuracy with which this can be interpreted. A review of recent assessment literature, commissioned by the Steering Group, concluded that:
- the distribution of degree classes varies between subject areas;
 - mark distributions at module level do likewise, particularly when the percentage scale is used;

- the use of grading scales of 15-20 points instead of percentage marks mitigates the discrepancies between the spread of marks at module level, but not greatly at award level;
 - the choice of assessment method (in crude terms, coursework as opposed to examination) influences classification;
 - the method ('algorithm') used to determine the classification influences the outcome; and
 - the particular regulations adopted by an institution in respect of assessments and awards influence honours degree classifications³⁵.
37. The Steering Group is also aware of research that suggests that “a legitimate desire on the part of institutions to ensure that the character of different disciplines, and different disciplinary practices, are not ignored” (QAA 2006b, p13)³⁶ and, in particular, “are contributing to difficulty in implementing consistent, transparent and equitable systems” (Dodson 2006, p2)³⁷ sector-wide. Many staff consider that it is “more important to ensure equity nationally within a discipline rather than within the University” (QAA 2006b, p8)³⁸.
38. Clearly, the way different institutions choose to assess their students influences outcomes and can undermine the criteria of transparency and fairness that the Steering Group has identified as being of particular importance to students. A more detailed analysis of 35 institutions’ regulations for the classification of their honours degrees, which we commissioned, revealed that although most institutions in the survey had institution-wide regulations for determining honours classification, some permitted faculties or schools to choose between possible methodologies or to vary in their arrangements for borderline students³⁹. In addition, the review found that autonomous institutions varied in the approaches they adopted, reflecting their own particular circumstances. Institutions, for example, take different approaches to aspects of assessment regulations such as:
- different academic staff, departments, subjects and institutions use the numerical points in numerical scales in different ways to mean a range of different things. For example some academic staff mark towards particular points on the scale that have a meaning for them;
 - the provision for borderline candidates (most widely set at 2 per cent below the threshold of each class and even sometimes above the threshold);
 - use of compensation/condonement for some element of failure;

- permitting students to retrieve failure in a module by retaking the failed assessments;
 - not permitting students to re-sit or repeat modules already passed;
 - the marking system (percentage scales or grades) used for assessment purposes;
 - including marks from level 2 and level 3 to calculate the class of degree; and
 - classification methodology regarding aggregation and/or profiling of marks.
39. Thus, “the class of honours degree awarded to a graduating student by an institution does not only reflect the academic achievements of that student. It reflects also the marking practices inherent in the...subjects studied, and the...rules authorised by that institution for determining the classification of an honours degree...” (QAA 2006a, p2)⁴⁰.
40. The Steering Group fully accepts that variations will, and do, occur in any large and complex system. Our research indicates, however, that in some cases the rationale for the differing approaches to regulations for classification have become obscure. In addition, in some institutions the regulations relating to assessment and classification are difficult to interpret or written in such a way that they appear to rely on tacit knowledge for interpretation. Variation in regulatory matters, in addition to having a direct or indirect impact on class of degree, also raises fundamental questions about what the honours degree classification is intended to represent. For example, does it show whether the class of degree “is intended to indicate the student’s ‘best’ performance or some conception of ‘average’ performance”? (Stowell, Woolf and Yorke 2006, p4)⁴¹.
41. We are aware that the sector has been intermittently engaged with these issues for decades. Evidence from an analysis of QAA audit reports suggests that there is currently “much thought and activity” among institutions about how best to achieve appropriate and necessary consistency whilst respecting discipline conventions (QAA 2007, p9)⁴². Our proposals are designed to assist with this process. **The Steering Group concluded that greater clarity in assessment practice is required. We discerned an interest from institutions in collectively exploring some of the principles of assessment practice and marking at sector level and we make a recommendation to this effect.**

The honours degree classification – conclusions

42. Throughout this period of considerable institutional and curriculum change, despite the increasing diversity of graduates and their learning experiences, and the information needs of employers, the honours degree classification has endured as the final judgement. The Steering Group acknowledges that it cannot ignore this durability, which suggests that the honours degree classification system has proved flexible enough to absorb such developments. Nonetheless, we have also noted that assessment plays a powerful role as part of learning itself and what is assessed and reported is what tends to be valued by students, lecturers and subsequently by employers. The Group believes that periodic summative assessment has its place within the overall package of assessment tools available to academic staff when assessing the components of a learning programme on an ongoing basis, but that this needs to be balanced with more learning-centred assessment practices and is certainly not the best way to express the final outcome.
43. The Steering Group concludes that the honours degree classification system which reduces the information about student achievement to five/six broad categories of classification and, arguably, two categories – First/Upper Second and ‘the rest’ - is far too blunt a tool to fully capture the qualities and capabilities of the modern student. Reducing such rich and complex information to a single judgement overplays the importance of that judgement and distracts from the wider and more enduring benefits of attaining a higher education. The summative judgment ‘snapshot’, recording performance at a certain point in time, is invested with an importance that undermines the sense of future development which should be actively fostered in a lifelong learning culture.
44. The Steering Group believes that the honours degree classification system currently masks the range of different types of achievement required of, and embodied by, an honours degree graduate in the 21st century. It already ‘wastes’ a host of valuable information generated by assessment and we believe it may be in danger of holding back pedagogic developments that require achievement to be expressed in ways other than as a single, summative number. The Steering Group is convinced that a range of organisational, structural, pedagogic and other imperatives make the case for change unarguable. Finding a solution has proved less easy and our own thinking has evolved through a number of options, which are explored in the next section.

Part 3: Options for change

Overview

45. We have debated both reforming and replacing the honours degree classification system, and considered a number of ways in which either of these might be achieved, against the criteria we set ourselves at the outset. The questions we considered centred on the two types of information contained in the degree documentation and the relationship between them namely:
- information about achievement (and in particular the potential for measuring and recording additional information)
 - the form of overall summative judgement classification used.

Models

46. We explored a range of other higher education systems in the hope that we might find practice which could be adapted for use in the UK and we commissioned research into systems used in the USA and Australia. Virtually all higher education systems classify, grade or differentiate overall levels of performance in their degrees, but there is considerable variation in the number of performance levels – the degree of granularity of the summative scale used – and the descriptors employed. Those we investigated ranged from zero to 14 separate points. A few other countries use a system akin to the UK honours degree classification and these appear almost wholly to have their roots originally in the UK system – of those we considered, only the UK, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, Malta and Hong Kong use the honours system of classification⁴³. A variety of different systems and methods exist, therefore, which provide useful comparator models. All the systems we examined provide some form of transcript and in terms of core content these have a lot in common.

Grade point average

47. We are aware that many UK institutions show a grade point average (GPA), or average mark, on their transcripts, as well as the honours degree classification. We considered whether this might form the basis of a replacement system. The study we commissioned of grading in the GPA system in the United States, however, revealed a very wide range of features and practices, each of which contribute to the computation of a GPA. Marks, for example, count equally in some circumstances whilst in others they are weighted. Although, of course, all summative statistics, by their nature, lose some detail, the research found that such calculations can “mask...the factors that influence the grades that students attain on individual courses”⁴⁴. On top of this, the summing to one or two decimal places gives a spurious impression of precision, implying greater accuracy than even the honours degree classification.

48. Like all systems that rely upon a summative judgement, GPA systems can encourage students to focus on the final mark which in turn can dissuade them from attempting demanding courses in case it adversely affects their GPA. The US GPA system has developed where 'honours' is not an important concept, and where there is less of a general feeling for 'graduateness' and the research we commissioned revealed that the GPA needed to graduate with honours varies between institutions. Introducing a GPA-style system across the autonomous UK higher education sector could replicate the weaknesses we are trying to address. If a summative judgement remains, following the next stages of work, however, the GPA should receive more detailed consideration alongside other options.

Summative scale

49. The Group also considered the advantages and disadvantages of alternative scales. Longer performance scales can provide a more detailed picture of performance of the overall cohort and can be a factor in increasing student motivation. When we consulted people we found a widespread idea that it would help to insert an extra band between the Upper and Lower Second or between an Upper Second and First class degree. Sub-dividing the Upper Second, some think, would help employers and others to differentiate between the growing numbers of students currently graduating with an Upper Second class honours degree.
50. Smaller performance scales are simple to grasp, but require more detailed supporting information. At the extreme, we found a system with no overall judgement which required staff to prepare individual narrative transcripts for each course studied. We felt this would be highly subjective and difficult to verify, as well as being enormously administratively burdensome. The Group was more attracted by other shorter scales such as the Swedish two/three point variant with usually no overall grade beyond Pass, but with the possibility of Distinction for exceptional performance, similar to current practice with UK Masters' degrees. A transcript detailing the outcomes from each programme studied – including differentiated grades awarded for course study – is provided in the Swedish system.
51. The Group has examined the possibility of replacing the existing honours degree classification system with either a longer or a shorter summative scale:

- Creating a **longer summative scale** by inserting an extra band in the existing classification would, we believe, be a short-term solution. An extra point inserted now would probably lead to a requirement for further differentiation in the near future, and thus give rise to confusion for students and employers. It would involve institutions in considerable disruption to no good, or permanent, effect. Furthermore, clustering of grades can occur on any scale, no matter how many points are used. In order to be fair, as the degree of differentiation increases so too does the need for consistency in approach – between different institutions and different programmes – in assessing students on a programme and in the gathering of an evidence base by academic staff in assessing students’ work. Since this is already a challenge to our existing system, the introduction of a longer scale could make things worse and lead to calls for the introduction of a common system of grading across UK higher education, which the Group agreed would, quite rightly, be unacceptable to institutions. The Group is therefore not persuaded by suggestions that a longer scale would serve UK higher education well in the long-term.
- We were more attracted by the idea of a **shorter summative scale**, principally because we thought it could divert attention from the summative judgement and force a consideration of the detail of the transcript. However, on more detailed consideration as our work developed, we began to appreciate that the benefits that we hoped such a system would bring would only partially be realised. A Fail/Pass/Distinction approach would be likely to replicate the problems of the current system with a perceived need on the part of students to focus on attaining a Distinction. Unless it was fully supported by a detailed transcript, such a short scale might prove demotivating to students. Following from this, we agree with other stakeholders and the sector that a shorter summative scale would not address the problems with the existing honours degree classification.

Alternative summative systems and scales – conclusions

52. We considered a wide range of options for replacing the honours degree classification but, as discussed above, found that the main issues associated with our existing system continued to prevail in one form or another. Replacing the current honours degree classification system would represent a major upheaval for the sector and other stakeholders and the Steering Group has been adamant that there must be clear, and clearly understood, benefits at the roots of any radical change it might propose.

53. During the two written consultation exercises and related events the Group consulted the sector both on the possibility of using the shortened scale Swedish-type model as a basis for further exploration and the alternative of increasing the number of scales of the degree classification. Neither stakeholders generally, nor the sector itself, have coalesced around a particular approach. We noted that responses to the written consultation exercises tended to support a longer scale whilst the more detailed discussions, afforded by the consultation events, favoured a shorter scale/transcript-led approach. On the whole, respondents tended to suggest changes within the current system rather than considering a new system. This reinforced our resolve to ensure that any changes we were minded to propose, should be on a scale that was acceptable to the sector.
54. The Steering Group considered whether some form of overall summative judgement needs to be retained at all. In most systems, and certainly in any that we propose, there will always be one judgement about whether the student has passed or failed. It will always be possible to fail honours (and probably then qualify for a different type of award). We have been considering the need for any sort of mark beyond this. We are acutely aware that most other countries currently seem to accept the need for simple and straightforward summative information relating to a student's overall achievements. Unable to find among these systems a suitable alternative to the honours classification, we concluded that it is the summative judgement itself that is the problem. Currently, the summative judgement thresholds distract and detract from information that conveys a fuller understanding of the skills and knowledge that the student has acquired. Ideally, it would be replaced with a more sophisticated approach that better represents the outcomes of student learning and encourage personal development and understanding in the context of lifelong learning. By its nature, an academic transcript presents information which shows the steps that build an award and thus potentially places it within the context of a bigger picture of a student's learning. We are convinced that the arguments and evidence point to a need for greater emphasis on the additional information contained in a more broadly-conceived and more detailed version of the transcript.

55. Our deliberations have shown, however, that both conceptually and practically, establishing a replacement system for the current honours degree classification is fraught with critical dangers that would need to be fully addressed before such a radical change was made. Furthermore, consensus among wider stakeholder groups about a replacement approach has been difficult to achieve. We acknowledge that, although our work has stimulated considerable interest and thoughtful and reflective responses, reactions from stakeholders have been mixed and some parts of the sector remain largely unconvinced of the need for radical change. With all of this in mind, we have tempered our proposals by recommending a stage of detailed exploration, development and testing to be carried out in parallel with, and complementary to, the continuation of the existing honours degree classification system at a pace which we trust the sector will find reasonable.

Part 4: Proposals and next steps

Proposals for change

56. For more than two years the Group has given extensive consideration to measuring and recording student achievement. We have taken stock of the current position and looked at predicted trends. We are confident that we have critically evaluated the honours degree classification system accurately, and identified the elements of a better system that would serve the interests of UK higher education stakeholders well. But it is clear that there are no alternatives which could be imported from elsewhere. Also, although we are clear about the features we think should comprise such a system, even conceptualising a new system fully is not wholly possible at this stage. Simple, sweeping change from our current arrangements to a new system is neither feasible nor desirable. We are therefore proposing a period of exploration, development and testing in stages, with a view to arriving at a new, complementary, approach (which may go on to provide the basis for a new system) by 2010.
57. We are proposing the development and implementation of an approach which aims to:
- capture a blend of knowledge, skills and experience acquired through a wide range of higher education experiences;
 - measure, record and provide students with a much broader picture of their achievements than now;
 - ensure that employers have better information about the distinguishing qualities of different graduates;
 - fit into and promote a culture of lifelong learning by appearing to be less of an abrupt 'end point'; and
 - be practical to implement, useful and used.
58. We have become increasingly convinced that the academic transcript has a key – and very much enhanced – role to play as a vehicle for recording achievement. The aims we have identified for the new approach could be addressed through increasing emphasis on this documentation and developing the information contained in the Diploma Supplement and academic transcript, to which institutions are already committed. Ideally, the Steering Group envisages a system where this information, contained on what we are calling the Higher Education Achievement Report, is the main formally documented outcome from higher education.

The Higher Education Achievement Report

59. We propose that:

- By Academic Year 2010/11, following a period of detailed development, a Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR) will be the central vehicle for recording all university-level undergraduate higher education student achievement in all UK higher education institutions. This proposal builds upon the model of a combined transcript/diploma supplement that was devised in response to demand from the sector, consulted on and generally welcomed;
- The HEAR will be a single document, based on, and developed from, the current academic transcript, and incorporating the European Diploma Supplement. It will contain a wider range of information than the current academic transcript and will capture more fully than now the strengths and weaknesses of the student's performance. It will also contain information about academic credit which will link directly to the national credit framework for the part of the UK in which the award is made. Core content will be common to all institutions, which will be free to add additional information as they desire;
- The HEAR will contain information which the institution is prepared to verify. Further work should be done on how to measure and record skills and achievements gained through non-formal learning but this, along with other student-generated/driven information, should be part of Personal Development Planning (PDP);
- In the short/medium term, the HEAR will also continue to contain an overall summative judgement, verified by the institution. During this period it is likely that this will remain the existing honours degree classification but we anticipate that alternatives will/might develop as the information available in the HEAR becomes richer; and
- In parallel, the UK higher education sector will have considered, debated and resolved a range of key issues and principles relating to the process of assessment. The outcomes, in turn, will feed into the development of the content of the HEAR.

60. Our timetable for development proposes that institutions develop the HEAR while retaining the honours degree classification. Although we intend that, ultimately, the honours degree classification will be rendered obsolete by the better information contained in the HEAR, we cannot be sure how such a system might develop in practice. The HEAR will contain marks (in whatever form the institution chooses to use) awarded to the separate components of the honours degree. Without an overall – and definitive – summative judgement, the temptation would be great on the part of students, employers and others to attempt to sum these themselves, to inaccurate and misleading effect. To allow such a situation to develop would be both intolerable and irresponsible. We are therefore proposing that this issue should be addressed as part of the detailed debate which the sector would need to have, following agreement to develop our proposals.
61. These proposals are explicitly expressed as stages in a journey. They can provide direction only, because, although we have specified our desired end point, we cannot be sure until the development work has been undertaken whether it is feasible to reach it. They also depend very much upon the active engagement of all stakeholders – particularly the sector – in developing the new approach and ultimately, a new system. As well as higher education institutions, the work will involve NUS and students’ associations, employers’ organisations, the UK higher education funding bodies and a range of sector support and development agencies including QAA, HEA and JISC. At Table 1, below, we outline the stages in the journey towards providing better information to students about their achievement.
62. Our intention is that these proposals will be recognisable to institutions as they are firmly, and deliberately, rooted in current developments and build on existing practice. As such, they will ensure that the UK higher education sector will be well-positioned to meet the demands that will be made of it in future, with minimal disruption or burden. The proposals may not resolve all issues – we have earlier acknowledged that reconciling all of our criteria for judging a new approach or system would be impossible – but we believe they will achieve an optimum balance and one that particularly recognises the needs of students.

Table 1: Developing the Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR) approach – proposed timetable				
Action/role	Lead	Participating/supporting	Timetable	Estimated cost/resources and funder/provider
Sector response to Report : In-principle decision to implement HEAR and decision to undertake further development	UUK, GuildHE	Funding Councils, QAA, HEA	By December 2007	UUK, GuildHE
Formation of a professional Development Group to coordinate work to take proposals forward	UUK, GuildHE	Funding Councils, QAA, HEA	By December 2007	Meeting costs – UUK, GuildHE Admin support – UUK, GuildHE Travel costs – funding councils Research costs – funding councils
Take forward development of core components of the HEAR Piloting and trialling with student groups and employers Develop a Guide for Employers on using the HEAR	HEA, QAA	CRA, QAA, UK Europe Unit, NUS, AGR, UUK, GuildHE,	Starting January 2008 Trialling begins Jan 2009 Guide commissioned Autumn 2009 Guide circulated Summer 2010	Meeting costs – UUK, GuildHE, HEA, QAA Admin support – UUK, GuildHE, HEA, QAA Travel costs – each organisation Trialling contract – funding councils Publication contract and costs – funding councils
Work on measuring and recording achievements of non-formal learning	CRA	CRA, HEA, NUS	Ongoing and parallel to development of HEAR	From existing sources
The development, feasibility and impact of electronic issues	JISC	PFIG	Project starts January 2008 Reports December 2008	Specific research project and publication – JISC/funding councils
Taking forward a wider debate about assessment issues and practices	HEA	UUK, GuildHE, QAA, Funding Councils	Series of workshops starting Jan 2008 Series of research reports published from May 2008	Admin support Conference costs Publications contracts and costs HEA/Funding Councils
Universal sector use of HEAR	HEIs		2010/11	Administrative costs – funding councils

Development phase

63. As Table 1 shows, stakeholders and supporting agencies will need to undertake a considerable range of development activities. These include:
- Development of the Higher Education Achievement Report;
 - Work with student and employer groups to test approaches;
 - Preparation of a guide to using the HEAR; and
 - Work on assessment issues.

Developing the Higher Education Achievement Report

64. As outlined, we propose that a Higher Education Achievement Report should be the central vehicle for recording student achievement in all UK higher education institutions. The HEAR will encompass all university-level undergraduate higher education qualifications, including the honours degree. It will include the credit points and level achieved which will link to the decision to award an honours degree or some other qualification. It will also continue to contain an overall summative judgement, verified by the institution. It is likely that in the medium term this will remain the existing honours degree classification, but we anticipate that alternatives might develop as the HEAR yields a wider range of information. These alternatives will evolve with the new approach over the longer term in ways that we cannot predict at this stage but our proposals anticipate the active participation of the sector in pursuing creative developments. Our preferred model is that the need for any sort of overall summative judgement will eventually wither away but we also acknowledge that the honours degree classification might be replaced with some other form of summative judgement.
65. The HEAR will be a single document, based on, and developed from, the current academic transcript, and incorporating the European Diploma Supplement. It will contain a wider range of information than the current academic transcript. Core content will be common to all institutions, which will be free to add additional information as they desire. We propose that the sector engages in developing, trialling and determining in detail the nature of this additional information over the next two academic years aiming to agree the enhanced core content by the time the HEAR is due to be widely implemented.

66. The Higher Education Academy (HEA) working in partnership with the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), with the full involvement of the sector, and advice from the UK higher education Europe Unit, must lead development of the new HEAR. We are proposing that this work builds on existing commitments to produce a transcript and the European Diploma Supplement (DS) by combining these, together with any additional information as institutions decide collectively and individually. Our consultations elicited a clear demand for guidance on the best way of combining the two and this should be developed as part of the process. This work should form a natural extension of current work being undertaken by NUS and the HEA with the Centre for Recording Achievement (CRA) on PDP, and the commitments made by QAA and partners to review and revise the PDP element of the Guidelines for higher education Progress Files.
67. Four elements of information will be merged as seamlessly as possible into the HEAR:
1. the Diploma Supplement;
 2. current transcript information;
 3. sector-agreed additional information that will form, with 1 and 2, the new core of the HEAR; and
 4. any additional information that institutions wish to add.
68. Work will need to be done to bring these strands of information together. We have already done some baseline work by consulting on a range of types of transcript with a range of levels and coverage of detail. We believe that a summary of existing transcript information (2, above) which every HEAR should contain, should be relatively easy for HEA to identify, although this information will need to be agreed by the sector. There will also need to be additional work, led by HEA, to explore and test the feasibility of the additional information which the sector considers needs to be added to this core (3, above). Further decisions will then need to be taken by individual institutions about which aspects, if any, of such information might be an option for decision by themselves (4, above).
69. The HEAR should only contain information which is verifiable by the institution. The Group considered 'non-formal' learning - the skills gained by students during other activities (for example, in the students' union, or by volunteering, or taking part in sports and societies) and acknowledged its importance in this context, as well as a growing recognition by students and employers of the value of such activities. We are recommending that further work is done on measuring and recording the skills and achievements gained through non-formal learning. We are clear, however, that student-generated/driven information should be part of PDP and kept separate from the HEAR, although there should be a relationship between the two. By its nature PDP-type information is not validated by the higher education institution.

70. At Annex E we have attached an example of how the HEAR might look which might be used as a basis for discussions. The model is a composite document drawing on institutional examples. It accords with the agreed Diploma Supplement fields and format (67.1, above). However, there remain a number of issues to be resolved:

- Students' (and employers') needs for a useful and better record of their achievement must be explored, identified and considered;
- The appearance of the HEAR, and the extent to which a common pattern can be developed for the provision of key information, will be especially important to employers who will need to compare HEARs from different institutions. Employers' main demand is simplicity because "the increasing numbers of graduates and employers now involved in graduate recruitment means that procedures have to be streamlined and speeded up"⁴⁵. The need for a concise, clear and simple HEAR could be at odds with an interest in including more information and a balance will have to be achieved;
- The nature and extent of information which it is reasonable to expect institutions to assess and verify will have to be established. Types of information that might appear in the HEAR could include comparative ranking; and the possibility of differentiating between a student's performance in different contexts, such as in timed examinations, assessed course work, projects, or oral performance and so on;
- Dovetailing the information contained in the HEAR with that needed for the Diploma Supplement will be crucial to minimise duplication and administrative burden. The information for the Diploma Supplement is already required in a common format and this might be usefully built upon in a way that will help employers find their way around the data and thus help reduce reliance on the summative judgement. Further work and input from the UK HE Europe Unit and the sector will be key to realising these opportunities;
- The information must not lend itself to generating informal or ad hoc summative judgements. Initially at least, the persistence of the honours degree classification should ensure this but the point must be fully addressed before the summative judgement is removed;
- To promote lifelong learning, the HEAR should be contextualised with information about both past and potential qualifications;

- A range of practical considerations regarding how much information must be provided in hard copy and how much can be cross-referenced to websites should be addressed. The UK HE Europe Unit has advised that the Diploma Supplement is intended to be a self-contained document. This could preclude use of cross-referencing to web pages or other documents. Given the opportunities now available for linking documents electronically there is at least potentially scope for making further information, for instance, the programme specification, available to supplement the HEAR on a discretionary and flexible basis. General opportunities to harness technology and ancillary software issues should be explored;
 - Means of preventing forgery and tampering need to be developed; and
 - A feasibility study into the cost of issuing the proposed HEAR will be required.
71. Further sources of information and practice which could be followed up include work in Ireland on the electronic interpretation of the DS and work in some institutions at Masters' level which provides further information on specified areas of achievement beyond the summative judgement which is made. In addition, developing practice in North America, where less formal, non-curricular activities are a central feature of the higher education experience, might yield some useful practice.

Students and employers

72. The reforms we are proposing aim to provide better information for students and employers. This will best be achieved, we believe, if these groups are fully consulted on the contents of the HEAR at the outset, and as work progresses, so that their needs can be accounted for in its design. Once the decision is taken to develop the new approach, ways need to be found to make it work for these important stakeholder groups.
73. Graduates need a record of the wider competencies and skills they have gained as students through both their studies and extra-curricular activities. Employers also want graduates to be able to identify and articulate their own achievements. The HEAR will record the achievement of academic skills and knowledge which the institution has formally validated. In addition, we are recommending that the Centre for Recording Achievement (CRA), HEA and NUS continue to work on PDP as a vehicle for measuring and recording the skills and achievements that students acquire through extra-curricular activities.
74. Our research evidence has encouraged us to think that it is possible to use means other than the degree classification to sift large numbers of applicants and that some employers are also making some use of the current transcript. We recommend that the practices of employers are investigated as part of this next stage of work to help devise ways in which all employers can make most efficient and effective use of the HEAR.

75. As the HEAR develops, piloting and trialling to establish what works must take place with student groups and employer groups.

Guide to using the Higher Education Achievement Report

76. Employers, in particular, will need assistance in interpreting the HEAR. As with the Guide to Credit that the Steering Group commissioned as part of its work on credit in England⁴⁶, the development of a guide to using the HEAR will be a crucial element in taking this work forward. Such a guide will need to be very widely circulated both within higher education institutions and also to schools, further education colleges, careers services, students and employers. Our evidence suggests that those developing the guide should consider the following:
- it will need to be as simple and straightforward as possible – if considerable guidance was to be needed to interpret the HEAR, its usefulness would be undermined; and
 - the guide notes should cover those sections of the HEAR which are expected to be used sector-wide. Institutions will be able to add to the guide such other notes as are required to cover local variations.

Assessment practice

77. Our work has unintentionally but necessarily involved us in detailed consideration of assessment policy and practice. Our consultations with the sector uncovered a widespread, strong and active interest in these areas on the part of higher education institutions and their staff, many of whom are already addressing aspects of these issues. The debate and discussion our consultations generated were largely welcomed, independent of institutions' views on our draft proposals.
78. An important dimension underpinning our proposals is that of the assessment systems that institutions will choose to use in compiling the HEAR. We acknowledge that there are no 'right ways' to make assessments but there are more, and less, appropriate assessment practices that relate effectively to the nature of that which is being assessed and it is up to each higher education institution to decide this. Assessment must be fit for purpose and this in turn requires a professional approach which clarifies goals, among other things. This is properly an area for each individual institution to determine and manage but we encountered a range of issues during our deliberations, and outlined earlier in this report, which suggest that assessment could be more fit for purpose. There would be merit in the sector making use of the opportunity of discussions around the introduction of the HEAR to pay some attention to this area collectively. Many institutions are already addressing these issues and will have much to contribute to a national debate, which we are convinced will be timely and well-received.

79. We are therefore proposing that, given its strong links with practitioners and ability to consider issues at both UK and subject level, the Higher Education Academy leads work in this area. This might take the form of a review of the key principles that underpin institutional assessment practices and how these principles are implemented through their assessment regulations. The Academy's role will be to identify, consider and disseminate evidence about existing practices and stimulate a robust debate against this background, working with the sector collectively on identifying alternatives and devising solutions to identified challenges. The various frameworks of higher education qualifications which pertain in different parts of the UK, and their qualification descriptors, set out agreed generic attributes of the general nature of an 'honours graduate outcome'. As part of this work, the Academy and the sector should consider how programmes, learning outcomes and assessment are brought together to meet the criteria for the award of an honours degree. We also believe that the Academy's current focus on the student learning experience could usefully be linked into this work in considering assessment methods that are designed to meet students' needs.

Conclusions

80. It has been ten years since Dearing hoped that the current honours degree classification system would wither of its own accord as the usefulness of the proposed Progress File was acknowledged. This has not happened. Furthermore, many employers remain largely unaware of the current academic transcript. Meanwhile, the proportion of First and Upper Second awards has increased, alongside the focus on the perceived need to achieve at this level. At the same time, the opportunities for providing a range of new types of information are considerable. Both students and employers have a growing interest in students and graduates being able to recognise the wider competencies and skills they have gained through their studies and extra-curricular activities. The availability of enhanced information contained in the proposed HEAR would encourage and support this activity and swiftly prove its usefulness to stakeholders.
81. Nonetheless, we suspect that while the honours degree classification, or some other form of summative judgement remains, reference to this additional, valuable – and indeed essential – information contained in the HEAR will be limited and its potential may remain under-exploited. We are seeking the active participation of the sector in taking this work forward. We have designed a development process intentionally so that, as the work progresses, and the HEAR becomes established, the benefits in terms of the richness of the information it yields about each individual student will increasingly come to be acknowledged and understood. As a consequence, we intend that the existing degree classification system will decline in importance until it should no longer be considered necessary, but we cannot and do not assume this will be easily achieved.

Appendix

Acronyms

ACCAC	Qualifications Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales
AGR	Association of Graduate Recruiters
BME	Black and Minority Ethnic
CCEA	Council for Curriculum Examination and Assessment [Northern Ireland]
CRA	Centre for Recording Achievement
DEL	Department for Employment and Learning (Northern Ireland)
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DIUS	Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills
DS	European Diploma Supplement
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
EWNI	England, Wales and Northern Ireland
FHEQ	Framework for Higher Education Qualifications
GPA	Grade Point Average
HEA	Higher Education Academy
HEAR	Higher Education Achievement Report
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
HEFCW	Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
JISC	Joint Information Systems Committee
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NUS	National Union of Students
PFIG	Progress Files Implementation Group
PDP	Personal Development Planning
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
SACWG	Student Assessment and Classification Working Group
SFC	Scottish Funding Council
THES	The Times Higher Education Supplement
UNESCO/CEPES	United Nations' Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization/European Centre for Higher Education
UUK	UniversitiesUK

Glossary

- Achievement** Accomplishing and demonstrating outcomes that a higher education experience is intended to promote.
- Assessment** The process of acquiring information about what has been learned and achieved through a higher education experience, and the use of such information to make judgements about the quality of learning and the standards of achievement.
- Assessment might be conducted by a teacher, by a group of students (peer assessment) or by an individual student (self-assessment).
- Assessment 'formative'** The diagnostic use of assessment to provide feedback to teachers and help students evaluate their learning during their learning experience.
- Assessment 'summative'** The process of collecting data about student achievement and reaching a decision about the overall extent and quality of student learning.
- It does not matter whether data is accumulated during a course, produced at the end, or both. It is used for certifying achievement, reporting grades on academic records, and determining course credits.
- Attainment** The act of achieving /accomplishing an intended learning outcome or personal aim or goal.
- Classification** The act of grouping students at the end of their programme into categories that reflect different levels of overall academic performance.
- Competence** Ability to use and apply knowledge and skill appropriately in a particular situation to achieve a desired outcome. A number or letter representing a student's overall performance in work that has been assessed.
- Grade** Grades are a measure of the extent to which the intended learning outcomes have been demonstrated.

Grade point In North America and those parts of the world that have adopted the United States system, the predominant grading scale is the Grade Point Average scale, which comprises letter codes and numerical grades that span the range 0 to 4 points divided in 0.1 increments.

The most common system is an A, B, C, D, F system: each letter is equivalent to a grade point, often 4 for A, 3 for B, 2 for C, 1 for D, and 0 for F. The main difference within the GPA system is whether institutions / schools use plus or minus grades (ie A+, A, A-).

Grade point average (GPA) A measure of a student's academic achievement calculated by dividing the total number of grade points received by the total number attempted.

European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) Developed by the European Commission to enable the recognition of study periods abroad, funded under the Erasmus and similar programmes. It has three constituent elements:

- 1) An information pack/course catalogue for incoming students from outside the nation of the host institution which includes:
- 2) A learning agreement specifying the courses to be taken, and agreed by the student and his home university and the host university;
- 3) A transcript of records detailing the students' performance in the courses taken, calculated in the local grading system and ECTS grades.

ECTS Grades (norm referencing system) All students successfully passing the evaluation or examination are listed from the student(s) with the highest mark to the student(s) with the lowest mark. Then, within the list, the precise grade points for the five different ECTS percentile groups from 'A' to 'E' are established and lines drawn to indicate the dividing points between:

- 'A' = the top 10 percentile;
- 'B' = the next 25 percentile;
- 'C' = the next 30 percentile;
- 'D' = the next 25 percentile;
- 'E' = the remaining 10 percentile.

European Diploma Supplement (DS) The Diploma Supplement developed by the European Commission, Council of Europe and UNESCO/CEPES is intended to provide a specification for a pan-European Transcript. It differs from the UK transcript in providing more detail about the programmes of study, the languages of instruction and assessment and information about the national educational system and awards frameworks in which the programme of study was undertaken. The UK has agreed to implement the DS as part of the Bologna agreement.

Honours degree	An honours degree is a Bachelors' degree which involves the student in advanced or distinguished study (see also Annex D).
Lifelong learning	Lifelong learning was defined by Dearing as "the practice of students of all ages and backgrounds pursuing education and training throughout life".(Dearing, 1997: 415). In 2007 a lifelong learning culture is characterised by a recognition on the part of government, education providers and learners themselves that learning can, and should, take place in a range of settings and modes and at all ages and stages of life and is not simply a series of one-off opportunities which ends when formal schooling/college/university ends.
Outcome	<p>Intended outcome: Descriptions of what students should know and be able to do as a result of their learning experiences.</p> <p>Actual outcomes: The gains in learning that result from a learning experience. These are normally evaluated with reference to the intended outcomes for the experience but there are also likely to be unanticipated outcomes for individual students.</p>
Performance	The act of doing something successfully. It involves using and applying knowledge and skill appropriately rather than merely possessing the knowledge and skill to do something.
Personal Development Planning (PDP)	<p>A structured and supported process undertaken by an individual to reflect upon their own learning, performance and / or achievement and to plan for their personal, educational, and career development.</p> <p>PDP is proxy for a number of approaches to learning that attempt to connect and draw benefit from reflection, recording and action-planning. PDP encourages learners to plan their own learning, to act on their plans, to evaluate their learning and to generate evidence of learning.</p>
Portfolio	A paper-based or electronic file produced and maintained by a learner to collect and organise their thoughts, ideas, descriptions of experiences, interactions, products and other evidence of learning, and reflections on their experiences and learning.

The learner may draw on this type of personal knowledge to represent themselves and their achievements to others; to display particular features of their work; or to help themselves plan their future learning and personal development. Many higher education institutions see portfolios as a way of encouraging learners to take on more responsibility for managing their own learning and development. They are an important tool for helping learners relate their higher education learning and wider experiences to the things that employers are interested in.

Progress File The Progress File contains records of a student's learning and achievements (transcripts and personal records) and a system of personal development planning.

Referencing (norm referencing) An assessment strategy in which judgements are made in terms of ranking subjects without reference to a fixed standard.

Referencing (criterion referencing) An assessment strategy in which judgements are made against defined assessment criteria.

Summative information Summative information about a student's learning and achievement can be provided in the form of:

- numerical / alphanumeric information - marks, letter coded grades, grade point averages
- descriptors of performance
- extended narratives
- profiles that blend different forms of information about a learner's abilities and achievements.

Summative judgement The overall judgement made about a student's performance. For an honours degree in the UK higher education system, this is usually expressed in the form of First, Upper Second, Lower Second, Third, Pass or Fail.

Reaching a summative judgement about a student's overall level of achievement for something as complex as a degree programme is not a simple matter. It begins with the evaluation of performance against intended learning outcomes and explicit assessment criteria for a particular assessment task. The assessment is marked (scored against a marking scheme) and/or graded (assigned to a category reflecting the level and quality of response). The marks/grades of different assessments that count towards the award are then combined using a formula or algorithm (e.g. at the end of a semester, programme year or end of the programme) to reach an overall level of performance. This is normally an automated and mechanistic process, although academic judgement is required when complexities are encountered such as particular circumstances that affect a student's performance. Judgement is then guided by a set of rules.

Summative statistic	A number, letter grade or classification that conflates all assessed academic achievements within a learner's programme of study.
Transcript (academic)	<p>An authoritative and official record of a learner's programme of study, the grades they have achieved and the credit they have gained.</p> <p>The HE Progress File set out a specification for a transcript (www.qaa.ac.uk). The European Diploma Supplement sets out a data set for a pan-European transcript.</p>
Transcript (narrative)	<p>Authoritative and evaluative descriptive statements about a student's learning and achievement.</p> <p>Narrative transcripts contain descriptive evaluations and judgements of a student's abilities and capabilities and perhaps also their attitudes to engaging in learning. They may be produced solely by a tutor or by a tutor in consultation with a student. Narrative transcripts may be the only form of summative statement or they may be used in conjunction with a record of the courses studied, the credit gained and the marks / grades (grade point averages for courses) achieved.</p>
Transcript (summative)	The transcript a student receives after completing a programme of study. Its primary purpose is to provide an official record of a student's programme of learning and achievement.
Transcript (formative)	The transcript a student receives while they are enrolled on a programme of study. Its primary purpose is to enable them to monitor their academic progress.

Annex A

Scoping Group recommendations relating to degree classification issues

The original Measuring and Recording Achievement Scoping Group made a number of recommendations relating to degree classification issues (UniversitiesUK, 2004). These were:

Recommendation 1: there is a need for further investigation of classificatory systems for the appropriate and effective representation and communication of learning and achievement.

Recommendation 2: a series of criteria for an effective system of representing and communicating student achievement should be identified and agreed by the higher education sector.

Recommendation 3: since the current system of degree classification no longer provides a sufficient means of summarising student achievement, it should be reviewed.

Recommendation 4: proposals for changing the degree classification system should not merely focus on the undergraduate degree but should take into account the complete range of higher education qualifications.

Recommendation 5: developments in describing, measuring, recording and communicating achievement should take place in parallel with, and as complementary to, the Diploma Supplement and ultimately the Europass.

Recommendation 6: higher education institutions should continue to implement Personal Development Planning within the guidelines developed by the Progress File Implementation Group. There should continue to be evaluation of the impact of learning and the representation of learning and achievement of different forms of Personal Development Planning.

Recommendation 7: in taking work forward on recording achievement in higher education full account should be taken of existing congruent practice including developments in schools and further education colleges, in the UK and elsewhere in Europe. The opportunity should be taken particularly to ensure that this dovetails with emerging proposals and policies for 14-19 education. Attempts should be made to ensure that optimal transitions for students, from school and further education into higher education, and within higher education itself, would be possible.

Annex B

Terms of reference and membership of the Measuring and Recording Student Achievement Steering Group

Terms of reference

- To consider and consult on practical proposals for the implementation of the recommendations contained in the report of the Measuring and Recording Student Achievement Scoping Group.
- Any proposals will need to consider and clearly highlight the differing needs and stages of development of the nations of the UK.
- To work with the sector to ensure support for and ownership of any proposed changes.
- To work with and consult wider stakeholders to identify and take account of their needs.
- To ensure a holistic approach to the issues is adopted, drawing upon a wide range of relevant work.

Membership:

Professor Robert Burgess (Chair)	Vice-Chancellor, University of Leicester
Professor Kenneth Bell	Professor Emeritus, previously Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Queens University Belfast
Professor Patricia Broadfoot	Vice-Chancellor, University of Gloucestershire
Dame Sandra Burslem	(formerly) Vice-Chancellor, Manchester Metropolitan University
Jim Crewdson	Principal, Wigan and Leigh College
Professor Hadyn Ellis	Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Cardiff University (Sadly, Professor Ellis died in November 2006)
Julian Nicholds	Vice-President Education, National Union of Students (to June 2006)
Carl Gilleard	Chief Executive, Association of Graduate Recruiters
Professor Donald Pennington	Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Coventry University
Professor Paul Ramsden	Chief Executive, Higher Education Academy
Professor Muriel Robinson	Principal, Bishop Grosseteste University College, Lincoln
Professor Alasdair Smith	Vice-Chancellor, University of Sussex
Wes Streeting	Vice-President Education, National Union of Students (from July 2006)
Susan Tuckett	Principal, Norwich School of Art and Design (member of the group until October 2006)

Professor Simon van Heyningen	Vice-Principal, University of Edinburgh
Professor David Vaughan	Principal, Cumbria Institute of the Arts
Peter Williams	Chief Executive, Quality Assurance Agency
Professor Michael Worton	Vice-Provost, University College London
Observers/corresponding members:	
Dr Liz Beaty	Director, Learning and Teaching, Higher Education Funding Council for England
Tish Bourke	Manager, UK Europe Unit (to September 2006)
Professor Phil Gummett	Chief Executive Officer, Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
Professor Nick Harris	Director, Quality Enhancement, Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
Dr Bill Harvey	Deputy Director, Learning and Teaching, Scottish Funding Council (SFC)
Steve Ingham	Policy Team Leader, Higher Education Directorate, Department for Education and Skills
Karen Jones	Senior Learning & Teaching Manager, HEFCW (to March 2006) then as: Policy Adviser, Higher Education Wales
Philip Lomas	Policy Team Leader, Higher Education Directorate, Department for Education and Skills (from June 2006)
Sean Mackney	Head of Learning and Teaching, Higher Education Funding Council for England
Gerard Madill	Policy Adviser, Universities Scotland
Jayne Mitchell	Assistant Director, Development and Enhancement Group, Quality Assurance Agency
Jessica Olley	Acting Manager UK Higher Education Europe Unit (from October 2006)
Dr Cliona O'Neill	Senior Learning and Teaching Manager, HEFCW (from 1 August 2006)
Graeme Rosenberg	Senior Policy Adviser, Higher Education Funding Council for England
Jane Tory	Policy Team Leader, Higher Education Directorate, Department for Education and Skills (to June 2006)

Secretariat:

Greg Wade

Policy Adviser, Universities UK

Helen Bowles

Policy Adviser, GuildHE

Nicola Berkley

Project Officer, Universities UK (to December 2006)

Jane Denholm

Consultant, Director, Critical Thinking

Annex C

Methodology

Measuring and Recording Student Achievement Scoping Group

The Scoping Group, chaired by Professor Robert Burgess, was established by the representative bodies with support from the funding councils in October 2003. The Group issued *Measuring and recording student achievement* in 2004, which included recommendations for the development of a common credit system for higher education in England.

Whilst the Scoping Group was established to consider the recommendations of the Higher Education White Paper for England, it was recognised that many of the issues had a UK-wide interest and the other parts of the UK were represented by observers at the meetings.

Measuring and Recording Student Achievement Steering Group

The Steering Group, chaired by Professor Robert Burgess, was established by the representative bodies with support from the funding councils in February 2005 to take forward the recommendations of the Scoping Group. The Group held regular meetings and met on a total of eighteen occasions. The membership of the Steering Group reflected a wide range of institutions, all the nations of the UK, and a wide range of organisations. The Steering Group was greatly helped by the work of the AGR, QAA, HEA and the Europe Unit. At its first meeting the Steering Group officially received the report of the Scoping Group and gave consideration to its recommendations. The way that information on student achievement is recorded and, in particular, the future of the honours degree classification was highlighted as one of two main themes for further work. The other theme – credit – was the subject of a report entitled *Proposals for national arrangement for the use of academic credit in higher education in England* - published in December 2006 together with a simple guide for users entitled *Academic credit in higher education in England*.

Consultation exercises

The Steering Group issued two consultation documents. The first, *The UK honours degree: provision of information*, issued in September 2005. The second, *The UK honours degree: provision of information – second consultation*, issued in September 2006. Both consultations were circulated to HEIs, employer groups, student groups, and other organisations. A total of 147 responses (including 99 from HEIs) were received in response to the first consultation, and 126 responses (including 99 from HEIs) were received in response to the second stage consultation.

Conference events

The Steering Group held five consultative conference events around the UK on the subject of degree classification. In 2006, these events took place on 23 March in Manchester and on 5 April in London. In 2007 the events took place on 26 September in Cardiff, 27 September in London and in Edinburgh on 6 October. The five events were attended by a total of 260 delegates from HEIs throughout the UK. Delegates included Pro-Vice-Chancellors, Academic Registrars, Heads of Quality, and a range of administrative staff.

Meetings

The Chair met and gave presentations to a wide range of sector officers' groups including pro-vice-chancellors for learning and teaching, academic registrars, the Higher Education Regulation Review Group, and student record officers. External groups included the Association of Graduate Recruiters.

Evidence

The work was informed by a wide range of evidence. The Steering Group considered the existing and extensive range of academic articles, including work on assessment practice and systems, and reports prepared for the original Scoping Group. It also commissioned further research from, among others, the QAA, HEA, SACWG and CRA on assessment practices and regulations and means and methods of recording different types of achievement in the UK and abroad, including Personal Development Planning, approaches to the transcript and the Diploma Supplement. The Steering Group also met with researchers and influenced the questions in a major HEFCE-funded study being carried out by the University of Sussex School of Education - *Establishing the needs of employers and related organisations for information about the quality and standards of higher education provision and student achievement in England* - which was designed to investigate, among other things, employer needs for information about student achievement.

Employer views

The Steering Group commissioned a series of meetings and focus groups with both small and medium sized employers and large graduate recruiters to determine their selection practices and seek their views and advice on potential changes to the way that degree information is provided.

Annex D

The honours degree

'Qualification descriptors' – the information supporting the framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (broadly applicable also in this case to Scotland) usefully summarise that 'honours degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

- a systematic understanding of key aspects of their field of study, including acquisition of coherent and detailed knowledge, at least some of which is at or informed by, the forefront of defined aspects of a discipline;
- an ability to deploy accurately established techniques of analysis and enquiry within a discipline;
- conceptual understanding that enables the student:
 - * to devise and sustain arguments, and/or to solve problems, using ideas and techniques, some of which are at the forefront of a discipline; and
 - * to describe and comment upon particular aspects of current research, or equivalent advanced scholarship, in the discipline;
- an appreciation of the uncertainty, ambiguity and limits of knowledge; and
- the ability to manage their own learning, and to make use of scholarly reviews and primary sources (eg refereed research articles and/or original materials appropriate to the discipline).¹

The framework describes the attributes of a typical holder of an honours degree who 'will be able to:

- apply the methods and techniques that they have learned to review, consolidate, extend and apply their knowledge and understanding, and to initiate and carry out projects;
- critically evaluate arguments, assumptions, abstract concepts and data (that may be incomplete), to make judgements, and to frame appropriate questions to achieve a solution - or identify a range of solutions - to a problem;
- communicate information, ideas, problems, and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences;

and will have:

- qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring:
 - * the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility;
 - * decision-making in complex and unpredictable contexts; and
 - * the learning ability needed to undertake appropriate further training of a professional or equivalent nature.²

Thus, honours degree graduates will have acquired understanding of a complex body of knowledge, a wide range of high level skills and a broad level of experience.

1 EwNI Framework QAA website <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/FHEQ/EwNI/>

2 EwNI Framework <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/FHEQ/EwNI/>

Annex E

Model to form the basis of the Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR)

This Annex provides a specification for the basis of the proposed Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR). This document would be issued on completion of the award of the final qualification. Its primary role is as an academic document designed to present information about student achievement in an academic context.

The illustration presented is a composite which draws upon existing practice within a number of UK institutions. It conforms with the Diploma Supplement (DS) fields and the ordering of data as agreed across Europe. In meeting these requirements, section 4.3 reflects the format of the existing HE transcript. The illustration leaves open section 4.4 for institutions to complete individually.

The illustration includes and builds upon:

- the DS specification;
- existing UK HE transcript;
- the national descriptions for Scotland and England/Wales/Northern Ireland; and
- illustrations of supplementary information for inclusion in section 6.1

This illustration is a development of a model produced for the Steering Group by the Centre for Recording Achievement (CRA).

Higher Education Achievement Report

This Higher Education Achievement Report is printed in black ink on paper watermarked with the crest of the University and carries the official University stamp. It is not valid unless in this format.

This Diploma Supplement follows the model developed by the European Commission, Council of Europe and UNESCO/CEPES. The purpose of the supplement is to provide sufficient recognition of qualifications (diplomas, degrees, certificates etc). It is designed to provide a description of the nature, level, context and status of the studies that were pursued and successfully completed by the individual named on the original qualifications to which this supplement is appended. It should be free from any value judgements, equivalence statements or suggestions about recognition.

1 INFORMATION IDENTIFYING THE HOLDER OF THE QUALIFICATION

- | | |
|---|------------------------------|
| 1.1 Family name(s): | Other |
| 1.2 Given name(s): | Ann Norma |
| 1.3 Date of birth (day/month/year): | 21-Aug-1981 |
| 1.4 Student identification number or code (if available): | 900900900/HESA Number 000000 |

HESA, the Higher Education Statistics Agency, UK, the unique national identifying number for students registered at a state university.

2 INFORMATION IDENTIFYING THE QUALIFICATION

- 2.1 Name of qualification and (if applicable) title conferred (in original language): Degree of Bachelor of Arts with Honours
- 2.2 Main field(s) of study for the qualification: French and Management Studies
- 2.3 Name and status of awarding institution (in original language): University of Easthampton- a chartered institution with taught and research degree awarding powers
- 2.4 Name and status of institution (if different from 2.3) administering studies (in original language):
- 2.5 Language(s) of instruction/examination: English and French

3 INFORMATION ON THE LEVEL OF THE QUALIFICATION

- 3.1 Level of qualification: UK Bachelors' Degree: level H3
- 3.2 Official length of programme: 4 years Full-Time Exempted from Programme Year 1
- 3.3 Access requirements(s) Detailed information regarding admission to the programme is available in the Universities on-line Prospectus at www.eastham.ac.uk/prospectus03/html

4 INFORMATION ON THE CONTENTS AND RESULTS GAINED

- 4.1 Mode of study: Full-time
- 4.2 Programme requirements: The Bachelor degree is obtained after 3 years of study (180 ECTS) with at least 120 at Level I and 100 at Level H. The learner must satisfy the programme requirements as prescribed in the Programme Specification and the Principles and Regulations of the Institution.
Please see www.eastham.ac.uk¹ for additional detail.
- 4.3 Programme details: (eg modules or units studied), and the individual grades/marks/credits obtained:
(if this information is available on an official transcript this should be used here) See below
- 4.4 Grading scheme and, if available, grade distribution guidance: Institutions to include information here as to how the degree classification was arrived at.
- 4.5 Overall classification of the qualification (in original language): First.
Awarded with 'Distinction in Spoken French'

5 INFORMATION ON THE FUNCTION OF THE QUALIFICATION

- 5.1 Access to further study: Access to postgraduate study: 2nd cycle degree or diploma.
- 5.2 Professional status (if applicable):

6 ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- 6.1 Additional information: Programme includes study or work experience outside the university (Year 3, Compulsory year abroad, including study and work placement in a second language). The student has successfully completed the British Council Year Abroad Personal Development Portfolio. This comprises
- a pre-departure check-list and skills audit;
 - a personal development plan;
 - a log-book/diary;
 - a series of structured questionnaires for use at intervals throughout the year;
 - an end-of-year summary report and review.
- Assessed by the university, it is a requirement for certification that the University confirms to the British Council that scheme requirements have been met.
- 6.2 Further information sources: www.eastham.ac.uk/students

7 CERTIFICATION OF THE SUPPLEMENT

- 7.1 Date: 1st July 2006
- 7.2 Signature:
- 7.3 Capacity:
- 7.4 Official stamp or seal:

¹ access to fuller information for example in relation to the programme specification. An alternative approach, to add a further abstract or summary of such information would create additional work to no clear benefit. Such links are of course time-limited. Courses/qualifications/regulations change over time and the responsibility of the institution to archive and link to the relevant - rather than current - data will be a continuing one.

8 INFORMATION ON THE NATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

4.3 Programme details: (e.g. modules or units studied), and the individual grades/marks/credits obtained:

		Results	Level ²	Credits	ECTS
Programme Yr 1 BA French and Management Studies					
Admitted with Advanced Standing From:					
University of EFG (see its transcript for further information)			C	(120)	(60)
Programme Year 2 BA French and Management Session 2003/04(Full time study)					
BUEC 2195	Introductory Mathematics for Management Studies (II)	85	I	10	5
BUEC 2230	Introduction to Accounting and Finance	83	I	20	10
BUEC 2675	Introductory Statistics for Management Studies (II)	85	I	10	5
FREN 2011	Language in Contexts I	72	I	10	5
FREN 2012	Language in Contexts II	72	I	10	5
FREN 2181	French Drama from the 17th to the 19th Century I	67	I	10	5
FREN 2182	French Drama from the 17th to the 19th Century II	67	I	10	5
FREN 2201	The Seventh Art - Cinema in France I	69	I	10	5
FREN 2202	The Seventh Art - Cinema in France II	69	I	10	5
BUEC 1820	Information Technology	40	C	5	2.5
Programme Yr 3 BA French and Management Studies Session 2004/05(Full time study)					
At the University of HIJK (see its transcript for further information)				0	0
FREN 9001	Year Abroad (A)	P	n/a	60	30
FREN 9004	Year Abroad (B)	P	n/a	60	30
BUEC 2850	Marketing	40	I	20	10
Programme Yr 4 BA French and Management Studies Session 2005/06(Full time study)					
BUEC 2200	Business Finance 2	82	I	20	10
BUEC 3070	Strategic Management	66	H	20	10
BUEC 3885	Management Decision Making and Information Systems	70	H	20	10
FREN 3010	Advanced Language Skills	67	H	20	10
FREN 3070	Bilingual Liaison Interpreting	76	H	20	10
FREN 3162	French as a Professional Language	76	H	10	5
FREN 3431	Written Varieties of French	76	H	10	5

Printed signature

Academic Registrar

² Here we use the Framework for HE Qualifications in England & Wales (Certificate, Intermediate and Honours, or C, I, H). In doing so we note that the systems for both Scotland and mainland Europe are different.

Description of higher education in Scotland³

Introduction

Scotland's distinctive higher education system has 21 higher education institutions (HEIs) (See www.hero.ac.uk). The 14 universities, the Open University in Scotland, 2 colleges of higher education, 2 art schools, and a conservatoire are part-funded for research, teaching and learning through the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council. The Scottish Agricultural College is funded by the Scottish Executive's Environment and Rural Affairs Department.

The HEIs are independent, self-governing bodies, active in teaching, research and scholarship. They decide the degrees they offer; the conditions on which they are awarded and the admissions arrangements. Degrees and other higher education qualifications are legally owned by the awarding institution, not by the state.

The HEIs offer qualifications at undergraduate (Bologna first cycle) and postgraduate (Bologna second and third cycle) levels. In Scotland, the law distinguishes the power to award degrees on the basis of completion of taught programmes from the power to award research degrees. Universities have powers to award taught and research degrees. Some other HEIs have powers to award degrees while others offer programmes leading to degrees awarded by HEIs with degree awarding powers.

Lists of institutions with powers to award degrees and institutions recognised by authorities in Scotland as being able to offer courses leading to a degree of another HEI may be found at www.dfes.gov.uk.

A small number of degrees are available in colleges of further education by the authority of a duly empowered HEI.

Qualifications

The types of qualifications awarded at undergraduate (first cycle) and postgraduate level (second and third cycles) in Scotland are described in the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in Scotland which includes qualifications descriptors, developed with the higher education sector (<http://www.qaa.ac.uk>). The Framework is an integral part of a wider national framework: the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework that covers all forms of programmes and qualifications from school to Doctorates (see table 1 and www.scqf.org.uk).

Institutions use SCQF credit points for students entering or transferring between programmes or institutions, and use ECTS for transfers within the European area.

³ Scotland has a distinctive higher education system and also operates under a devolved government, including for higher education. There is a separate Description of Higher Education in England, Wales and Northern Ireland where the system is different to that of Scotland.

Admission

Requirements for particular programmes are set by the HEIs, which offer a range of routes for entry and/or credit transfer into their programmes, and admit students whom they believe have the potential to complete their programmes successfully. The Open University is an open entry institution.

The most common qualification for entry to higher education is the Higher or Advanced Higher or, for entrants from the rest of the UK, the General Certificate of Education at 'Advanced' level (including the "advanced supplementary") or comparable qualifications. Four or five Highers are normally taken in the 5th and 6th year of secondary school or at a college of further education and studied in considerable depth, involving coursework and final examinations. Advanced Highers are taken in the 6th year. A major route into Degrees, often with transfer of credit, is from Higher National Qualifications offered in colleges of further education.

Quality assurance

Standards of qualification and the quality of the student learning experience are maintained by the HEIs using a range of processes including extensive use of external examiners. In some subject areas, Professional and statutory bodies have a role to ensure that programmes meet the needs and standards of the particular profession.

HEIs in Scotland demonstrate their public accountability for quality and standards through a national quality assurance framework that has a strong focus on enhancement as follows:

HEIs take account of a QAA published U.K.- wide code of practice for quality assurance, and U.K. subject level 'benchmark statements' on standards (see www.qaa.ac.uk).

Subject level issues are addressed by HEIs' internal reviews conducted in accordance with guidance issued by the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council (SFC) (see www.sfc.ac.uk);

External reviews are conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in Scotland (QAA). The Agency is an independent body established to provide public confidence in the quality and standards of higher education. It involves students in its quality enhancement activities. The Agency publishes reports on the outcomes of reviews and the confidence that can be placed in the HEIs' arrangements for assuring and enhancing standards and quality, and for ensuring that they provide public information that is complete, accurate and fair (see www.qaa.ac.uk).

A national development service supports students in their role as active participants in assuring and enhancing quality and standards (see www.sparqs.org.uk).

This national description is endorsed by the Quality Working Group which is a national committee with members from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, Scotland; The Scottish Higher Education Funding Council; The Universities and the National Union of Students in Scotland.

Description of Higher Education in England, Wales and Northern Ireland

In England, Wales and Northern Ireland⁴, Higher Education institutions are independent, self-governing bodies active in teaching, research and scholarship and established by Royal Charter or legislation. Most are part-funded by government.

Higher Education (HE) is provided by many different types of institution. In addition to universities and university colleges, whose Charters and statutes are made through the Privy Council which advises the Queen on the granting of Royal Charters and incorporation of universities, there are a number of publicly-designated and autonomous institutions within the higher education sector. About ten per cent of higher education provision is available in colleges of further education by the authority of another duly empowered institution. Teaching to prepare students for the award of higher education qualifications can be conducted in any higher education institution or further education college.

Degree awarding powers and the title 'university':

All the universities and many of the higher education colleges have legal power to develop their own courses and award their own degrees, and determine the conditions on which they are awarded: some HE colleges and specialist institutions without these powers offer programmes, with varying extents of devolved authority, leading to the degrees of an institution which does have them. All universities in existence before 2005 have the power to award degrees on the basis of completion of taught courses and the power to award research degrees. From 2005, institutions in England and Wales that award only taught degrees ('first' and 'second cycle') and which meet certain numerical criteria, may also be permitted to use the title 'university'. Higher education institutions that award only taught degrees but which do not meet the numerical criteria may apply to use the title 'university college', although not all choose to do so.

All of these institutions are subject to the same regulatory quality assurance and funding requirements as universities; and all institutions decide for themselves which students to admit and which staff to appoint.

Degrees and other higher education qualifications are legally owned by the awarding institution, not by the state.

⁴ The UK has a system of devolved government, including for higher education, to Scotland, to Wales and to Northern Ireland. This description is approved by the High Level Policy Forum which includes representatives of the then Department for Education and Skills (DfES) now the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills. (DIUS), Scottish Executive, the Welsh Assembly Government, the Higher Education Funding Councils for England and Wales and the Scottish Funding Council, the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), Universities UK (UUK), the Standing Conference of Principals (now GuildHE) and the National Recognition Information Centre for the UK (UK NARIC).

The names of institutions with their own degree awarding powers (“Recognised Bodies”) are set out at:

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/recognisedukdegrees/index.cfm>

Institutions able to offer courses leading to a degree of a recognised body (“Listed Bodies”) are listed by the English, Welsh and Northern Irish authorities. The list may be found at:

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/recognisedukdegrees/index.cfm>

Qualifications

The types of qualifications awarded by higher education institutions at sub-degree and undergraduate (first cycle) and postgraduate level (second and third cycles) are described in the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications for England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ), including qualifications descriptors, developed with the sector by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA - established in 1997 as an independent UK-wide body to monitor the standard of higher education provision - www.qaa.ac.uk). The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), the Qualifications Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales (ACCAC) and the Council for Curriculum Examination and Assessment, (Northern Ireland) (CCEA) have established the National Qualifications Framework, which is aligned with the FHEQ with typical credit values. These authorities regulate a number of professional, statutory and other awarding bodies which control qualifications at HE and other levels.

Foundation degrees, designed to create intermediate awards strongly oriented towards specific employment opportunities, were introduced in 2001 and are available in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. In terms of the European HE Area they are “short cycle” qualifications within the first cycle.

Quality assurance

Academic standards are established and maintained by higher education institutions themselves using an extensive and sophisticated range of shared quality assurance approaches and structures. Standards and quality in institutions are underpinned by universal use of external examiners, a standard set of indicators and other reports and by the activities of the QAA and in professional areas by relevant Professional and Statutory Bodies. This ensures that institutions meet national expectations described in the FHEQ: subject benchmark (character) statements, the Code of Practice and a system of programme specifications. QAA conducts peer-review based audits and reviews of higher education institutions with the opportunity for subject-based review as the need arises. Accuracy and adequacy of quality-related information published by the higher education institutions is also reviewed. QAA reviews also cover higher education programmes taught in further education institutions.

Credit systems

There is a national credit system in place in Wales which embraces all post-16 education. Around 75% of institutions in England and Northern Ireland (around 85% of students) belong to credit systems consortia. There are local credit systems in some other institutions. QCA is developing a system intended for further education in England, the Framework for Achievement, designed to articulate with higher education. Many institutions use credit points for students transferring between programmes or institutions, and use ECTS for transfers within the European area and to recognise learning gained by students on exchange visits with institutions elsewhere in Europe.

Admission

The most common qualification for entry to higher education is the General Certificate of Education at 'Advanced' (A)-level (including the "advanced supplementary"). Other qualifications for entry are the Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education, the kite-marked Access Certificate or other qualifications located in the National Qualification Framework (NQF) level 3 Advanced, or the equivalent according to the Credit and Qualifications Framework in Wales, including the Welsh Baccalaureate and qualifications in the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework. A-levels are normally taken by students in their 13th year of school or at a college of further education and comprise up to three or four specialist subjects studied in considerable depth, involving coursework and final examinations. Part-time and mature students may enter with these qualifications or alternatives with evidenced equivalent prior learning and experience. Institutions will admit students whom they believe to have the potential to complete their programmes successfully, and set their requirements

Illustrations of supplementary information for inclusion in Section 6.1

National Level Illustration: measured/assessed performance in non-academic contexts

The student has successfully completed the British Council Year Abroad Personal Development Portfolio. This comprises

- a pre-departure check-list and skills audit;
- a personal development plan;
- a log-book / diary;
- a series of structured questionnaires for use at intervals throughout the year;
- an end-of-year summary report and review.

Assessed by the University, it is a requirement for certification that the University confirms to the British Council that scheme requirements have been met.

Institutional level Illustration: measured/assessed performance in non-academic contexts.

1. Successful completion of the ____ Award, based on a programme of transferable skills training and experiential learning. To obtain this University certificate, students must plan, pursue and reflect on an active programme of personal development. They must show evidence of critical reflection on experience, identifying ways in which their formal and informal learning has prepared them for work and life. Assessment takes place in the final year: written assessment is modelled on a graduate application form, and oral assessment takes the form of a ten-minute interview. Assessment involves both academic staff and representative employers and is moderated by the University.
2. Completion to Bronze Level of the Personal Skills award offered jointly by the Students Union and the University.
The Bronze award reflects completion of five courses: Communication Skills (Key Skills Programme), Presentation Skills (Study Skills Programme), and any 3 other courses.

National Level Illustration: Additional formal role(s) undertaken by students for which no recognition is provided in terms of credit

1. Millennium Volunteer 2005/6. (A nationwide Government initiative set up to encourage 16-24 year olds to become active in their local communities). Completion of 200 hours: Award of Excellence made.
2. Mentor: Aim Higher Initiative Black & Minority Ethnic (BME) Mentoring Scheme (2005/6). Students carry out short-term placements in schools and colleges to increase the educational achievement and aspirations of BME pupils and other learners. A typical placement will comprise 10 half or whole days in successive weeks over one or two semesters.

Institutional Level Illustration: Additional formal role(s) undertaken by students for which no recognition is provided in terms of credit

Completion of a one-year sabbatical officer appointment as Education Officer: Students' Union (2005/6). Elected to work full time to steer the Students' Union and represent its members, sabbatical officers are responsible for implementing policies decided upon by the members of the Union.

Annex F

References

This Annex repeats the relevant references used by the original Scoping Group augmented by more recent work. Reports and studies commissioned by the Steering Group are listed first.

Reports for the Steering Group

SG 05/41 *Employer consultation* consolidated report (Denholm J 2006(a)) on various employer consultations (Higher Education Academy 2005, Denholm J 2006(b) and Thomas L and Kulej M 2005) prepared for meeting of Steering Group on 1 February 2006

SG 06/26(a) Yorke M and SACWG colleagues (2006) *Some recent findings related to the classification of honours degrees in the UK: A report to the Burgess Committee* prepared for meeting of Steering Group on 26 July 2006

SG 06/26(b) Yorke M (2006) *Grading in the US: A summary for the Burgess Group* prepared for meeting of Steering Group on 26 July 2006

SG 06/26(c) Yorke M (2006) *The honours degree classification in Australia: A summary for the Burgess Group* prepared for meeting of Steering Group on 26 July 2006

SG 06/33 Ward R and CRA colleagues (2006) *The Diploma Supplement and the HE transcript: Models for integration* prepared for meeting of Steering Group on 26 July 2006

SG 06/34 Stowell M, Woolf H, Yorke M and SACWG colleagues (2006) *Variability in regulations for the classification of honours degrees* prepared for meeting of Steering Group on 26 July 2006

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Notes

- 1 Universities UK 2004.
- 2 Including academic and academic-related staff and managers in higher education institutions, students, employers and their representative organisations, professional bodies and educational and other interested agencies.
- 3 Morley L. et al. October 2006.
- 4 Lifelong learning was defined by the 1997 Dearing Report as, “the practice of students of all ages and backgrounds pursuing education and training throughout life” (1997, p415). In 2007 a lifelong learning culture is characterised by a recognition on the part of government, education providers and learners themselves that learning can and should take place in a range of settings and modes and at all ages and stages of life and is not simply a series of one-off opportunities that ends when formal education ends.
- 5 There are two Frameworks, one for Scotland and one for the rest of the UK. Here we refer to the England, Wales and Northern Ireland (EWNI) Framework although it is broadly applicable to Scottish qualifications
<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/FHEQ/EWNI>.
- 6 National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (1997) *Higher Education in the Learning Society* (the ‘Dearing Report’) Norwich HMSO (p139, para 9.48).
- 7 The Group acknowledges some earlier parallel work in Scotland by the Scottish Quality Enhancement Theme Group on Assessment as well as the criteria based on work by Byrne and Hornby: (Byrne R and Hornby W [2004] *What’s wrong with Honours Classifications?* Presentation to Scottish Enhancement Themes Seminar Considering the Honours Degree Classification System 11 May 2004 (<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/scottishenhancement/events/default.htm#notes>)). 2004.
- 8 Department for Education and Skills (DfES), 2003 *The Future of Higher Education* Norwich, TSO p49, para 4.10.
- 9 National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education 1997, p139, para 9.44
- 10 National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education 1997, p140, para 9.52
- 11 Universities UK 2004, p18, para 33
- 12 Universities UK 2004, p18, para 33
- 13 Universities UK 2004, p19, para 34
- 14 National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education 1997, p7, para 1.1
- 15 Committee on Higher Education 1963
- 16 National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education 1997, p11, para 1.20
- 17 National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education 1997, p106, para 7.21
- 18 National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education 1997, p34, para 3.53
- 19 HM Treasury 2006
- 20 Watson 2006 p8

- 21 Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland each have their own credit system in operation. England has a number of regional credit consortia and the report of the Burgess Group 2006 *Proposals for national arrangements for the use of academic credit in higher education in England* recommends that credit arrangements for higher education in England should be developed at a national level by the start of academic year 2008/09
- 22 Conference of Ministers responsible for Higher Education 2003 p5
- 23 Morley L. et al. October 2006 p20
- 24 Morley L. et al. October 2006 p10; Denholm 2006(b) p2
- 25 Denholm 2006(b) p5 SG 05/41
- 26 Denholm 2006(b) p4 SG 05/41
- 27 Morley L. et al. October 2006 p14
- 28 Morley L. et al. October 2006 p15
- 29 Thomas and Kulej 2005
- 30 Purcell et al 1999 p40
- 31 Purcell et al for the Career Services Unit 1996 *Great Expectations; 1999 Working Out?; 1999 Moving On*
- 32 Yorke and SACWAG for HEA May 2006 Burgess Committee SG 06/26(a)
- 33 DfES 2003 p49 para 4.10
- 34 Yorke, THES 26 January 2007 p2
- 35 Yorke and SACWG for HEA May 2006 Burgess Committee SG 06/02(a)
- 36 QAA 2006(b) p13
- 37 Dodson 2006 p2
- 38 QAA 2006(b) p8
- 39 Stowell, Woolf, Yorke and SACWG for HEA June 2006 Burgess Committee SG 06/34
- 40 QAA 2006 (a) p2
- 41 Stowell, Woolf, Yorke and SACWG for HEA June 2006 Burgess Committee SG 06/34 page 4
- 42 QAA April 2007 p9
- 43 Denholm 2004, Karran 2005
- 44 Yorke May 2006 Burgess Committee SG 06/26(b)
- 45 Morley L. et al. October 2006 p11
- 46 Universities UK, GuildHE and QAA (2006) *A Guide to Credit in Higher Education in England* available at www.universitiesuk.ac.uk

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ISBN 978 1 84036 164 6

October 2007