

Higher Education Achievement Report and university postgraduate admissions

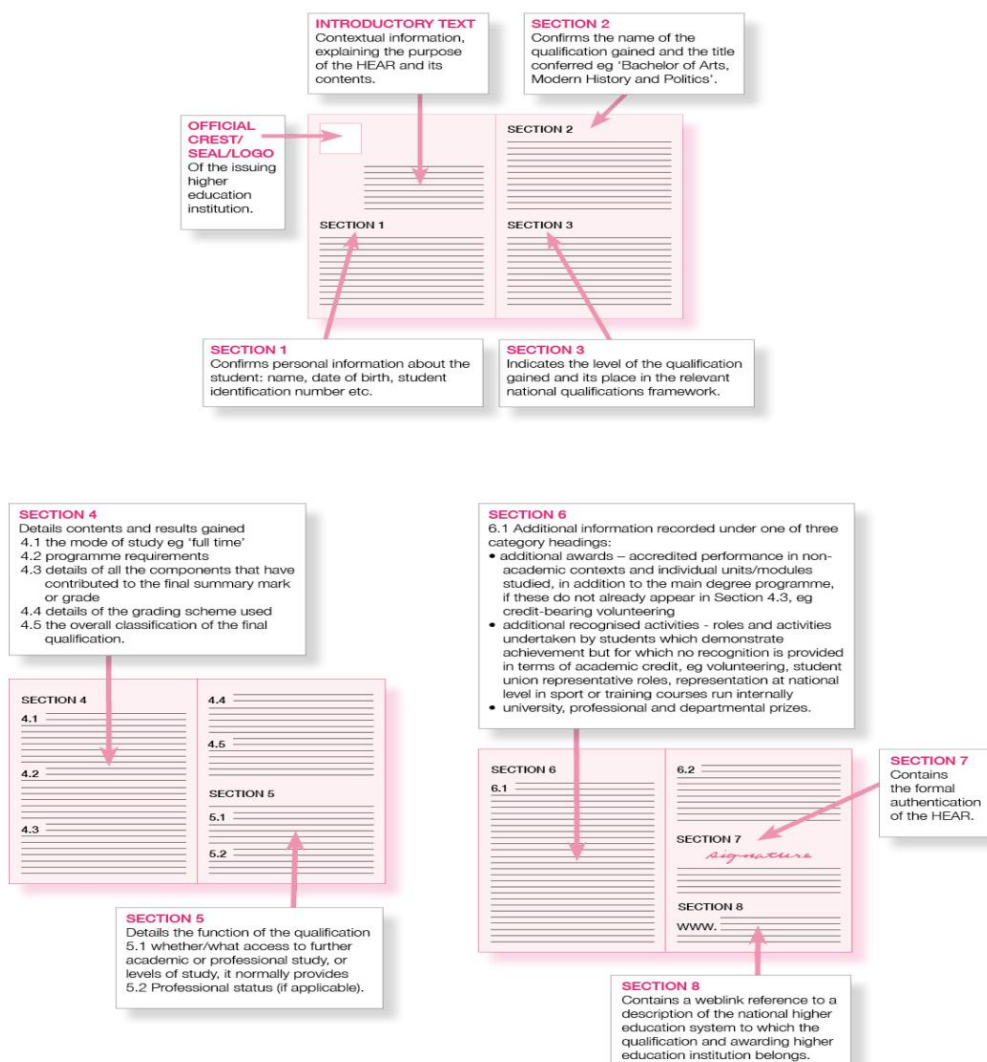
www.hear.ac.uk



- “The HEAR will potentially encourage students to be more self-aware and, in turn, more self-selecting – they will be able to match themselves to postgraduate programmes better – “do they have the skills to fit?” and this will help give them an idea of whether to apply or not.”(Humanities College of a Russell Group university)
- “Some of our postgraduate programmes are heavily oversubscribed. There could be 200-300 applicants for 25 places. We have to be very strict in what we’re looking for. The personal statement is very important to applications in these circumstances, as are references. Section 6 of the HEAR might well be helpful - either as an aide memoire to applicants or for the University to see, directly.” (Postgraduate admissions office in a post-92 university)
- “The HEAR is a trusted document that means it will be easier to get offers sorted.” (Postgraduate admissions in Medical School)
- “The HEAR allows you to see more of the person.” (Humanities College of a Russell Group university)

The Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR) is an electronic document, following a clear and standardised template, that details a student’s achievement, represented through a rich picture of their overall higher education experience. The HEAR will be built up and available throughout a student’s career in higher education, and can be used as an aid to selecting candidates for graduate study programmes.

At-a-glance guide to the HEAR (click on the image or visit www.hear.ac.uk/about)



How will postgraduate admissions use the HEAR?

Universities are both 'producers' and 'consumers' of HEAR information and, with the latter role in mind, three diverse university postgraduate admissions officers were interviewed for this briefing (the Humanities College of a Russell Group university, the central postgraduate admissions office in a post-92 university and a postgraduate medical school in a Russell Group university). Drawing on these discussions, the HEAR has the potential to add value to postgraduate selection and recruitment processes:

By providing a standardised structure

Postgraduate admissions officers welcome the fact that the HEAR will assist the application process by providing a clear and standardised template for considering candidates.

By assisting selection

All of the universities interviewed can see a clear and useful role for the HEAR where they are actively selecting postgraduate students. In highly competitive programmes, where requirements are stringent, the HEAR can provide a welcome additional layer of detail. For example, in business programmes, the HEAR can provide the university with valuable additional information about the candidate in terms of what they have done outside academia – whether they have business or leadership experience, for example.

By facilitating better applications

Universities, like employers, consider one of the HEAR's key strengths to be its capacity as an 'aide memoire' for students, who may not find it easy to marshal evidence to support their claims for specific capabilities or characteristics (eg working in teams). An additional benefit for postgraduate admissions tutors is that the process of compiling their HEAR should help make students more aware of their own strengths and weaknesses and, therefore, be more attuned to their interests and more realistic in making applications for postgraduate study. Similarly a personal statement is important to applications, especially in cases where programmes are highly selective. Section 6 will be helpful as an aide memoire to applicants (or indeed, for the potential admitting university to see, directly). Of course, many of the direct benefits of the HEAR are likely to apply to postgraduate admissions made immediately after undergraduate study. In professional postgraduate programmes, most students will have been working for four or five years so the university will be looking for more recent, relevant experience than might be available on an 'old' HEAR.

By exposing / diagnosing gaps

Admissions tutors think the fact that Section 4 offers a detailed breakdown of the skills likely to have been developed within a programme may provide a 'diagnostic opportunity' to ensure applicants are appropriately supported on programmes where this is relevant and appropriate.

By replacing academic references

For some groups of incoming students, the HEAR might supplant the need for academic references. Where a reference is required, the HEAR/Section 6.I can be used by the member of staff alongside the student's CV, course description and marks and 'allows you to see more of the person'. Interviewees considered the transition between undergraduate and Master's level study an important one¹. A good reference gives an impression of whether the applicant is ready and has the ability and maturity to move on to study at this level. For postgraduate research one question is 'would they be a good junior colleague?'. Section 6.I could help with these decisions by revealing this sort of information.

In being a trusted document

Universities can see the HEAR's value in providing an institutionally verified record of wider achievement which might limit the need to check and confirm qualifications; the HEAR is 'a trusted document that means it will be easier to get offers sorted'.

This briefing has been prepared from the findings of a small-scale research project, sponsored by the Higher Education Academy, to consider the ways in which a range of different types of employers may use the Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR) in their organisations and circumstances. It is based on in-depth interviews with postgraduate admissions offices and aims to provide those who will benefit from the introduction of the HEAR with key messages from emerging practice.

¹ CQFW Levels 6 and 7, NQF Levels 6 and 7, SCQF Levels 10 and 11