

Higher Education Achievement Report and small and medium size enterprises (SMEs)

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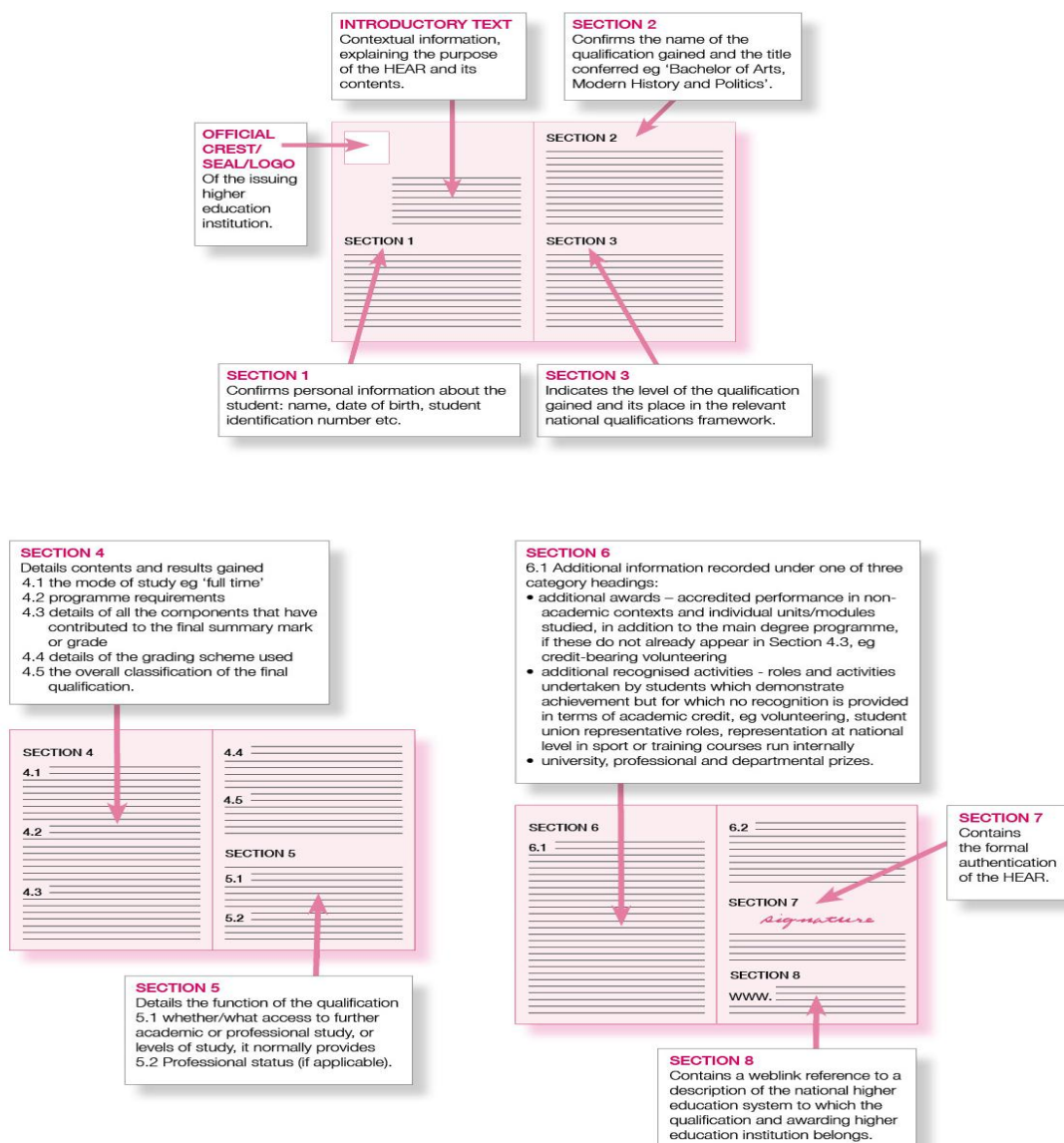
Higher Education Achievement Report

“We are not interested in the degree classification - the whole person is of far more interest to us. We need people who can take responsibility and are able to pitch in as and where necessary.” (SME employer)

“The HEAR will be really helpful as an aide memoire for a graduate when composing their CV and letters of application.” (SME employer)

The Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR) is an electronic document that may help in recruitment processes by showing in detail, and in a form verified and signed off by the university, some, at least, of what a graduate has achieved during their time in higher education. Employers who make use of such information in their selection processes will be able to make more informed decisions about the people they choose to become part of their businesses. The HEAR will be built up and available throughout a student’s career in higher education and can be used as an aid to selection in recruitment and as the starting point for further development in the workplace. All HEARs follow a clear and standardised template.

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



How may SMEs make use of the HEAR?

Small and medium size enterprises (SMEs) cover a wide range of organisations across the economy. Defined by the EU as employing 250 employees or less, they represent 99% of all enterprises in the EU economy and take an increasing proportion of graduates, though not necessarily into jobs which might initially be described as 'graduate level'.

The HEAR has the potential to add value to selection and recruitment:

By providing remote access to electronic documents to identify potential candidates

Where some SMEs recruit on an 'as-and-when' basis, others have a clear recruitment strategy. Where the latter is in place, given the number of applicants, it would be unrealistic to review the HEARs of everyone at the shortlisting stage. However, using software which allows the identification of graduates with experiences and achievements of interest will potentially offer an effective strategy.

By providing more detailed information about academic achievement

Many SMEs report they are not interested in the honours degree classification - anticipated or obtained. This may reflect the view that possession of a degree is itself an appropriate filtering mechanism, or that the post they offer is not best considered in terms of academic ability alone. However Section 4 could be useful, especially in respect of specialist roles. It will allow employers to check the elements within the qualification studied prior to any formal discussion with the candidate.

By providing additional information about potential employees beyond academic achievement

Section 6.1 is seen as key here because it 'says something about the person, which might help to see the fit with the cultural values of the organisation' ... 'we need people who are pretty numerate but we also need them to have great communication and team-working skills'. For example, at a recent interview day directors of one company were really impressed with the communication skills of three applicants, all of whom had been ambassadors for the AimHigher scheme. They then looked for similar experiences in future applicants. In professional contexts, prizes, especially professional prizes, are useful indicators of relevant achievement.

By providing material for discussion at interview

The HEAR can provide a context for interview, particularly where small organisations do not have human resource specialists. Most interviewers will employ a common set of questions but the HEAR can allow these to be contextualised and customised in the light of a more rounded and detailed picture of the applicant's achievements; it can make interviews more personal and allow candidates to talk about their real experience(s). Of particular value, in terms of recruiting from a wide degree pool, are the more generic skills and attributes recorded in the HEAR: these could be 'really brilliant to frame interview questions of the 'can you give me an example?' variety'. Similarly, in Section 6, prizes can provide a further context for an interview question of the 'what did you have to do to achieve this?' variety, and provide information on specific employability awards, which may be new to employers. Information about additional roles is also helpful, demonstrating breadth of engagement and providing a 'hook' for further interview questions.

By providing significant indirect benefits

Like other employer groups, SMEs are keen to stress the benefit of the HEAR to applicants themselves: 'really helpful as an aide memoire for a graduate when composing their CV and letters of application'; as a result they should benefit indirectly through better, targeted applications.

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 small and medium size employers and aims to provide those who will use the information contained in the HEAR with key messages from emerging practice.