

Meeting
2/03/07

Agenda Item
15

Reference No
HEFCW/07/24

INTRODUCTION

- 1 This paper invites Council to agree the recommendation of the Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC) regarding Wales' participation in the National Student Survey in 2008 and beyond and the sharing of external examiners' reports.

BACKGROUND

- 2 The Teaching Quality Information (TQI) website provides qualitative and quantitative information relating to teaching quality across the UK. It also provides the results of the National Student Survey of final year students in higher education across England, Wales, Northern Ireland and some HE institutions in Scotland.
- 3 At its January meeting the Council approved in principle the costs of the Teaching Quality Information/National Student Survey (NSS) for 2007. The Council also approved the LTC's recommendation in relation to the removal of qualitative TQI information from the website and its publication by institutions elsewhere eg on their websites.
- 4 The cost of the TQI/NSS for 2006/07 to HEFCW is estimated to be £211,513. This was reported to the Council at its January meeting.

PARTICIPATION IN THE NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY IN 2008 AND BEYOND

- 5 The Learning and Teaching Committee made a recommendation at its January meeting that the National Student Survey be supported in 2008 and beyond. This was reported to Council at its January meeting.
- 6 The LCT made this recommendation following a presentation on the analysis of the results from Ms Paula Surridge, University of Bristol.
- 7 One area on which she was questioned was whether the frequency with which the survey should be carried out could be reduced. She noted that a reduction in frequency might not permit weaker HEIs the opportunity to show how they have improved and might also result in HEIs missing the opportunity to identify problem areas. In addition, changes such as the introduction of higher fees for students might impact on results. She suggested that at least three or four years of results would be required before any decision should be made regarding implementing a lesser frequency of the survey, eg biennially.
- 8 The Chair noted that the NSS was introduced as part of the agreement between the Funding Councils and the sector over replacement for individual subject review, and therefore alteration of the frequency might have further implications.
- 9 HEFCE supports the participation of English institutions in the NSS and has agreed to support the NSS in 2008 and beyond. An increasing number of institutions in Scotland is participating and the Scottish Funding Council has said it will review the Scottish participation at some point to determine whether it should start to fund this activity on behalf of all Scottish institutions.

- 10 Subsequent to the meeting of the LTC, HEFCW officers requested that the frequency of the survey be reviewed by the UK TQI/NSS steering group following the publication of the 2007 results in order to ensure that the optimum frequency of the survey be agreed. A further report will be made to Council in due course.

The Council is invited to agree the recommendation of the LTC that Wales should continue to participate in the National Student Survey in 2008 and beyond.

EXTERNAL EXAMINERS' REPORTS

- 11 The qualitative information removed from the TQI website included summaries of external examiners' reports for England. English institutions have now been recommended to share external examiners' reports with student representatives.
- 12 The LTC considered the outcomes of consultation in Wales on the development of the TQI and the NSS and agreed a recommendation that institutions which did not already share external examiners' reports with student representatives should consider doing so.
- 13 If Council agrees with this recommendation it will be included with a circular reporting on the outcomes of the TQI/NSS consultation.

The Council is invited to agree the recommendation that institutions which do not already share external examiners' reports with student representatives should consider doing so.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 14 The participation of Wales in the National Student Survey in 2008 and beyond carries financial implications. The cost of participation in the survey in 2007/08 and 2008/09 is estimated to remain similar to the 2006/07 cost (ie £211,513).
- 15 Funding for participation in the 2008 survey has been set aside in the Learning and Teaching Fund 2007/08. This includes the balance of funding for the 2007 survey and part payment towards the 2008 survey.

PUBLICITY IMPLICATIONS

- 16 The NSS results tend to be widely publicised and are of interest to applicants, institutions and the press. There may also be publicity implications resulting from the relaunch of the TQI site in summer 2007.

RISK ASSESSMENT

- 17 The table below identifies potential risks and actions taken to ameliorate those risks.

Risk	Amelioration
Lack of availability of information to potential students regarding Welsh HE provision if Wales does not participate in the NSS in 2008 and beyond, which could potentially result in fewer students choosing to study at Welsh institutions.	Participation of Welsh institutions in the NSS in 2008 and beyond.
There is a risk of negative publicity should users provide adverse feedback on the relaunched website.	The UCAS/HotCourses consortium has undertaken a rebranding exercise for the website. It is using focus groups to ensure that the site is easily usable,

	focused on the end users, and that the content is both useful and available in an accessible way.
There is a risk that students will not participate effectively in feedback if representatives do not have the opportunity to see external examiners' reports.	Approval of the recommendation that institutions which do not currently share external examiners' reports with student representatives should consider doing so.

DIVERSITY AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 18 The University of Bristol has been contracted to analyse the 2006 results. This analysis is being conducted at a number of levels, and will look at patterns of responses regionally and nationally, to consider, for example, if women experience teaching in different ways to men. The analysis will look at the following characteristics in particular: (i) gender, (ii) age, (iii) socio-economic group, (iv) ethnicity, (v) declared disability, (vi) prior educational attainment, (vii) distance from address to University, and (ix) mode of study. The analysis will also endeavour to examine differences in responses between English and Welsh medium respondents in Wales.
- 19 The TQI/NSS materials and website are available in Welsh.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 20 The Council is invited to:
- (i) agree the recommendation of the LTC that Wales should continue to participate in the National Student Survey in 2008 and beyond;
 - (ii) agree the recommendation that institutions which do not already share external examiners' reports with student representatives should consider doing so.

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