

To: Heads of higher education institutions in Wales

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To: tqi@hefce.ac.uk

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TEACHING QUALITY INFORMATION WEB-SITE: PROGRESS REPORT

I am aware there have been concerns about the implementation of the Teaching Quality Information (TQI) web-site. I am therefore writing to provide an update on developments, and invite comments on the proposed subject groupings to be used on the site.

SUMMARY OF PROGRESS

An agreement has been entered into between HERO and HEFCE (acting for the four funding bodies), for the development and management of a UK TQI website. The web-site aims to publish reliable and accessible information about the quality and standards of teaching across the UK, to help inform the choices of students and others, and to contribute to public accountability.

Circular W04/05HE 'Teaching Quality Information (TQI) Requirements for Higher Education in Wales' (January 2004), set out the intended timetable to launch the site (with a partial dataset) by summer 2004, with a complete set of data (excluding the National Student Survey) to be available by December 2004. Since that publication, HERO have constructed the site and provided institutions with training and support to enable them to populate it with their reports. The site went live in August 2004, albeit with limited information. HEIs were also provided with their HESA data in the TQI format, for reviewing.

However, as the site developed it became apparent that the quantitative data would require more detailed review than allowed for within the published timetable, and that further consideration would be needed about the subject structure. The process of HEIs reviewing their TQI data highlighted varied practice across the sector in recording data, and there has been a greater than anticipated need by institutions to review their HESA data when presented to them in the TQI format. Unfortunately, the review process was complicated by problems experienced at HERO in providing institutions with an accurate and user-friendly preview of their data in this format.

In addition, given the lack of a stable time series for some aspects of the data, we found that initially data could only be produced at a level of subject detail that was broader than intended. At the same time, the Summer 2004 consultation on the National Student Survey highlighted limitations in using the Joint Academic Coding System (JACS), to structure data on the site.

Following some concerns raised by institutions, the funding bodies agreed with HERO that the quantitative data should not be added to the site until the technical issues were resolved and HEIs had ample time to review and understand their data. We believe that these issues have now been resolved, and the first set of HESA data will be added to the site at the end of February 2005. Nevertheless, these data remain limited in terms of the level of subject detail, and some tables are being withheld following requests by individual institutions, on the basis that the underlying data problems will be addressed for the future.

Given the limitations of the information currently on the TQI site and the need to review the subject structure, the funding bodies have asked HERO to present it clearly as 'under development', and not to actively publicise it yet. We are aware that the site would benefit from a number of improvements, in addition to the issues related to the HESA data. This gives HERO, working with others, an opportunity to improve the site before the public launch.

Thus we do not anticipate that at this stage the site will be used significantly by applicants. It is nevertheless important to continue populating it to schedule, so that HERO and the site's sponsors can obtain developmental feedback, but also to avoid an unduly lengthy gap in public accountability regarding the quality of teaching at the subject level.

Planned Developments

In terms of planned developments of the site:

- a) The subject structure will be revised so that future datasets will be made available at a more detailed subject level. During January 2005 HEFCE consulted through a series of events about a proposed new subject structure for publishing NSS results. Delegates agreed strongly that such a structure should apply to the TQI site overall, but requested an opportunity for further consultation on the details. **Annexes A and B** set out the structure now being proposed for the TQI site. Comments on the above, or any other aspects of the proposed structure should be e-mailed to **tqi@hefce.ac.uk** by **Friday 18 March 2005**.
- b) We expect that both centrally and in institutions other issues related to the HESA data will be ironed out for future datasets. By summer 2005 a second dataset will be added to the site, using the agreed subject structure. In addition, HERO will work with HESA to improve the review process for HEIs in future, and this should become less burdensome as it becomes more routine.
- c) The results of the National Student Survey will be incorporated into the site, from late summer 2005. In January 2005 HEFCE consulted, through a series of events, on methods for displaying these results. Papers from the events and a summary of the consultation outcomes are available on the HEFCE web-site, www.hefce.ac.uk under Learning and teaching/National Student Survey. Once the subject structure has been agreed during March, HEFCE will provide institutions with the opportunity to review how each of their students involved in the survey features within the reporting structure.
- d) The site will be extended to include the whole UK, although in some areas the datasets will differ, and a Welsh-language mirror site will be provided for HEIs in Wales.

In taking these developments forward, HERO will consult with an advisory group including Universities UK, NUS and other relevant stakeholders and agencies. It is also setting up a consultative group of HEI staff involved in TQI, and a group of prospective users. HERO would value constructive feedback from institutions and others during this developmental phase. HERO are keen to have volunteers from across the UK and especially staff who can comment on the Welsh medium site. Please contact Bethan Thomas (bethan.Thomas@unn.ac.uk) if you wish to be considered.

The four UK HE funding bodies have provided HERO with additional resources to increase its capacity to manage and develop the TQI site, and to support HEIs and end users. We are also funding a project based at the Institute of Educational Technology at the Open University to gather and evaluate feedback from early users of the site, and make recommendations to HERO and the sponsoring bodies for improvements to the site during its initial years.

By summer 2005, we expect substantial progress in a number of these areas, and that the site will provide accurate, accessible and appropriately detailed information. At that stage we will, with HERO and others, publicise and launch the English and Welsh medium TQI web-sites with a campaign aimed primarily at potential applicants for 2006, and their advisers.

It will be important that by the launch in summer 2005 the site is fully populated, and hence it is important that HEIs continue to publish and, where relevant, update learning and teaching and employer link summaries. When QAA review teams consider an institution's public information, as part of the Institutional Review (IR) process, it is likely that their conclusions will be informed by the track record of the institution in publishing reports in a timely manner.

From summer 2005 onwards, we expect the TQI site to be a valuable resource for prospective students and others. It will provide an efficient way for institutions to meet their public reporting obligations under the quality assurance framework, and indeed a number of obligations under the Freedom of Information Act. At the same time the site will continue to improve and evolve for some years, in response to user and sector feedback.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Phil Gummett
Chief Executive

Annex A

Invitation to comment on the proposed subject classification for presenting TQI data

1. The TQI site will provide information about quality and standards using a standardised structure so that users can make comparisons between HEIs. Evidence suggests that prospective students (who, along with their advisers, are the main intended users of the site) are interested largely in information relating to courses. Through the TQI consultation and development processes since 2001, it was agreed that the best available method for achieving this would be to use the Joint Academic Coding System (JACS) to organise information on the TQI site.
2. JACS has been developed jointly by HESA and UCAS; details of the system can be found at www.hesa.ac.uk/jacs. It contains detailed coding of subjects which are grouped into 143 Principal Subjects, which in turn are grouped into 19 Subject Areas. JACS codes are universally recorded for each student: as part of the HESA student record, institutions systematically code the qualification aim of each student with one or more JACS Subjects. Most students are coded with a single JACS Subject; joint degree students are coded with two or three.¹
3. HESA publications and the initial dataset due to go live on the TQI site at the end of February 2005 use the 19 Subject Areas. (HESA publications also often use four supplementary subject areas.) The stated intention in HEFCW Circular W04/05HE, and proposed again in the context of publishing NSS results (Circular W04/30HE), was to make data available at both Principal Subject and Subject Area levels on the site.
4. However, responses to the HEFCW/HEFCE NSS consultation in summer 2004 highlighted concerns about this approach. Many regarded the 19 Subject Areas as too broad to meaningfully reflect provision at the HEI, because they often conflate distinct departments or areas of provision. Related to this, they were also regarded as more general than is likely to be of use to prospective students, if what they want is information relating to courses. On the other hand, the Principal Subjects were regarded as too narrow in many cases, often containing too few students at individual HEIs to produce reliable information.

¹ Although in principle it could be possible to organise TQI data by course for some provision, HESA does not collect course-level data, and large parts of the HE sector are no longer focused on the traditional notion of a linear course.

5. We have therefore worked with HESA to develop a hierarchy of subject groupings, based on Principal Subjects, that would be better suited to presenting TQI (and specifically NSS) data. The proposed hierarchy and its derivation from Principal Subjects is set out at Annex B.² This was presented to and discussed during January at a series of consultation events about the reporting of NSS results. The papers for those events and a summary of the outcomes of the discussions are available on the HEFCE web-site, www.hefce.ac.uk under Learning and teaching/National Student Survey.
6. Delegates generally supported the proposed hierarchy and strongly agreed that a single structure should be used for the TQI site as a whole. They also requested a further opportunity for institutions to comment on the details of the proposed hierarchy. This annex provides such an opportunity. Readers are encouraged to refer to the papers on the HEFCE web-site, which include an analysis of student numbers involved in the NSS at each institution and at each level in the proposed subject structure.
7. The proposed hierarchy is summarised as follows:
 - a. The intention is that 'Level 2', comprising 38 subjects, would be offered to TQI users as the primary reporting option for all elements of TQI information (although users will also be able to search by course titles and key words within course titles to access the information). This primary reporting level aims to better reflect the way provision is typically organised in HEIs (although this of course varies considerably across the sector), and to provide a more useful level of detail to prospective students than the Subject Areas. At the same time, it aims to contain substantial numbers of students within each subject as a basis for reporting data, and specifically to produce reliable NSS results.
 - b. From the 38 subjects at Level 2, we propose that users should be able to 'drill down' to access more detailed data at 'Level 3', comprising 105 subjects. Rather than use the 143 Principal Subjects for this more detailed level, the proposed 105 subjects combine some Principal Subjects that contain very small numbers of students and are hence unlikely to be of use. (They generally contain too few students to produce publishable NSS results even for a single institution.)

² We are aware that HESA and UCAS are due to consult shortly about some proposed revisions to JACS, including a small number of amendments to the definition of some Principal Subjects. Such changes would affect data collection from 2007-08, and may have a knock-on effect for TQI in future. Given the likely nature of the changes, we do not expect that the impact on the reporting levels proposed in this paper will be substantial.

- c. From Level 2, users would also be able to aggregate upwards to the broader 19 subjects at 'Level 1', and to whole institution level ('Level 0'). This facility would be particularly useful where student numbers are too small to be useful or reliable at Level 2. It would address the concerns from smaller institutions, and about smaller areas of provision generally, that only limited data could be reported about them at Level 2.³
8. The new structure would affect the way that users can search the site and access data and reports. It would not affect the way institutions organise or load their qualitative reports, as these would continue to be mapped to Principal Subjects, and hence to the proposed hierarchy. Following finalisation of the structure during March, we will give institutions an opportunity to view how their students' feedback through the NSS will be organised within the reporting structure. Essentially this will involve institutions viewing the Principal Subject coding of each student involved in the survey.
9. We would welcome comments on the following:
 - a. Does the main reporting level of 38 subjects strike an appropriate balance between subject detail, and student volume? And do Levels 1 and 3 provide appropriate means of drilling down to more detail, and of aggregating upwards?
 - b. Do you have any comments on the way that particular Principal Subjects have been grouped within the hierarchy?
 - c. Do you have any comments on the naming of any of the subjects in the hierarchy?
10. There have been some suggestions that TQI might be improved if, rather than using a standardised subject structure, data were organised according to each institution's own definitions of departments or courses. In the short term, it is not feasible to consider this option, as no such data are currently available and could not be made available without significant changes to the HESA record. Therefore we are committed to the JACS-based approach in the short term.
11. Comments on the above, or any other aspects of the proposed structure should be e-mailed to tqi@hefce.ac.uk by **Friday 18 March 2005**.

³ In addition, this issue can be addressed in future years by enabling users to aggregate data over two or three years.

Annex B

Proposed hierarchy of subjects

Level 1 (Subject Areas)	Level 2	Level 3	Principal subjects		
Medicine & dentistry	Medicine & dentistry	Medicine	A0 - Medicine and dentistry A1 - Pre-clinical Medicine A3 - Clinical Medicine A9 - Others in Medicine and Dentistry		
		Dentistry	A2 - Pre-clinical Dentistry A4 - Clinical Dentistry		
Subjects allied to medicine	Medical science and pharmacy	Anatomy, Physiology and Pathology	B1 - Anatomy, Physiology and Pathology		
		Pharmacology, Toxicology and Pharmacy	B2 - Pharmacology, Toxicology and Pharmacy		
	Nursing	B7 - Nursing			
	Other subjects allied to medicine	Complementary Medicine	B3 - Complementary Medicine		
		Ophthalmics	B5 - Ophthalmics		
	Aural and Oral Sciences	B6 - Aural and Oral Sciences			
	Other subjects allied to medicine	B0 - Subjects allied to medicine B4 - Nutrition B8 - Medical Technology B9 - Others in Subjects allied to Medicine			
Biological sciences	Biological sciences	Biological sciences and Botany	C0 - Biological sciences C2 - Botany C9 - Others in Biological Sciences		
		Biology	C1 - Biology		
		Zoology	C3 - Zoology		
		Genetics	C4 - Genetics		
		Microbiology	C5 - Microbiology		
		Molecular Biology, Biophysics and Biochemistry	C7 - Molecular Biology, Biophysics and Biochemistry		
		Sports science	C6 - Sports Science		
		Psychology	C8 - Psychology		
		Veterinary science	Veterinary science	Veterinary Medicine and Dentistry	D1 - Pre-clinical Veterinary Medicine D2 - Clinical Veterinary Medicine and Dentistry
					D6 - Food and Beverage studies D0 - Veterinary Sciences, Agriculture and related subjects D3 - Animal Science D4 - Agriculture D7 - Agricultural Sciences D9 - Others in Veterinary Sciences, Agriculture and related subjects
Agriculture & related subjects	Agriculture and food	Food and Beverage studies			
		Agriculture, Animal Science and related subjects			
Physical sciences	Physical sciences	Forestry	D5 - Forestry		
		Chemistry	F1 - Chemistry		
		Physics and Astronomy	F3 - Physics F5 - Astronomy		
		Forensic and Archaeological Science	F4 - Forensic and Archaeological Science		
		Geology	F6 - Geology		
		Ocean Sciences	F7 - Ocean Sciences		
		Others in physical sciences	F0 - Physical sciences F2 - Materials Science F9 - Others in Physical Sciences		
		Physical geography & environmental science	Physical and Terrestrial Geographical and Environmental Sciences	F8 - Physical and Terrestrial Geographical and Environmental Sciences	
		Mathematical sciences	Mathematical sciences	Mathematics and Statistics	G1 - Mathematics G3 - Statistics G91 - Others in Mathematical Sciences
				Operational Research	G2 - Operational Research
Others in Mathematical and Computer Sciences	G0 - Mathematical and Computer Sciences G90 - Others in Mathematical and Computing Sciences G99 - Mathematical and Computing Sciences not elsewhere classified				
Computer science	Computer science	Computer Sciences	G4 - Computer Science		

Level 1 (Subject Areas)	Level 2	Level 3	Principal subjects
			G5 - Information Systems
			G6 - Software Engineering
			G7 - Artificial Intelligence
			G92 - Others in Computing Sciences
Engineering & technology	Mechanically-based engineering	General Engineering	H1 - General Engineering
		Mechanical, Production and Manufacturing Engineering	H3 - Mechanical Engineering
		Aerospace Engineering	H4 - Aerospace Engineering
		Naval Architecture	H5 - Naval Architecture
		Electronic and electrical engineering	H6 - Electronic and Electrical Engineering
		Other engineering & technology	H2 - Civil Engineering
		Chemical, Process and Energy Engineering	H8 - Chemical, Process and Energy Engineering
		Others in Engineering	H0 - Engineering
			H9 - Others in Engineering
		Materials Technology	J2 - Metallurgy
			J3 - Ceramics and Glasses
			J4 - Polymers and Textiles
			J5 - Materials Technology not otherwise specified
		Maritime Technology	J6 - Maritime Technology
	Other Technologies	J0 - Technologies	
		J1 - Minerals Technology	
		J7 - Industrial Biotechnology	
		J9 - Others in Technology	
Architecture, building & planning	Architecture, building & planning	Architecture	K1 - Architecture
		Building	K2 - Building
		Landscape Design	K3 - Landscape Design
		Planning (Urban, Rural and Regional)	K4 - Planning (Urban, Rural and Regional)
		Others in Architecture, Building and Planning	K0 - Architecture, Building and Planning
			K9 - Others in Architecture, Building and Planning
Social studies	Economics	Economics	L1 - Economics
	Politics	Politics	L2 - Politics
	Sociology, social policy, and anthropology	Sociology	L3 - Sociology
		Social Policy	L4 - Social Policy
		Anthropology	L6 - Anthropology
		Others in Social studies	L0 - Social studies
			L9 - Others in Social studies
Human and social geography	Human and Social Geography	L7 - Human and Social Geography	
Social work	Social Work	L5 - Social Work	
Law	Law	Law	M0 - Law
			M1 - Law by area
			M2 - Law by Topic
			M9 - Other in Law
Business & administrative studies	Business	Business studies	N1 - Business studies
		Marketing	N5 - Marketing
		Others in Business and Administrative studies	N0 - Business and Administrative studies
			N7 - Office skills
			N9 - Others in Business and Administrative studies
	Management	Management studies	N2 - Management studies
		Human Resource Management	N6 - Human Resource Management
		Tourism, Transport and Travel	N8 - Tourism, Transport and Travel
	Finance & accounting	Finance	N3 - Finance
		Accounting	N4 - Accounting
Mass communications and documentation	Media studies, Mass communications and documentation	Information Services	P1 - Information Services
		Publicity studies	P2 - Publicity studies
		Media studies	P3 - Media studies
		Publishing	P4 - Publishing
		Journalism	P5 - Journalism

Level 1 (Subject Areas)	Level 2	Level 3	Principal subjects
		Others in Mass Communications and Documentation	P0 - Mass Communications and Documentation P9 - Others in Mass Communications and Documentation
Languages	English based studies	English studies American and Australasian studies	Q3 - English studies T7 - American studies T8 - Australasian studies
	European language and area studies	Celtic studies Classics French studies German and Scandinavian studies Italian studies Iberian studies Other European Languages, Literature and related subjects	Q5 - Celtic studies Q6 - Latin studies Q7 - Classical Greek studies Q8 - Classical studies R1 - French studies R2 - German studies R6 - Scandinavian studies R3 - Italian studies R4 - Spanish studies R5 - Portuguese studies R0 - European Languages, Literature and related subjects R7 - Russian and East European studies R9 - Others in European Languages, Literature and related subjects
	Other language and area studies	Linguistics Comparative Literary studies Others in Linguistics, Classics and related subjects Asian studies African and Modern Middle Eastern studies Others in Eastern, Asiatic, African, American and Australasian Languages, Literature and related subjects	Q1 - Linguistics Q2 - Comparative Literary studies Q0 - Linguistics, Classics and related subjects Q4 - Ancient Language studies Q9 - Others in Linguistics, Classics and related subjects T1 - Chinese studies T2 - Japanese studies T3 - South Asian studies T4 - Other Asian studies T5 - African studies T6 - Modern Middle Eastern studies T0 - Eastern, Asiatic, African, American and Australasian Languages, Literature and related subjects T9 - Others in Eastern, Asiatic, African, American and Australasian Languages, Literature and related subjects
Historical and philosophical studies	History & archaeology	History	V1 - History by period V2 - History by area V3 - History by topic
		Archaeology Others in Historical and Philosophical studies	V4 - Archaeology V0 - Historical and Philosophical studies V9 - Others in Historical and Philosophical studies
	Philosophy, theology, and religious studies	Philosophy Theology and Religious studies	V5 - Philosophy V6 - Theology and Religious studies
Creative arts & design	Art & design	Fine Art Design studies	W1 - Fine Art W2 - Design studies
	Performing Arts	Music Drama Dance	W3 - Music W4 - Drama W5 - Dance
	Other creative arts	Cinematics and Photography Imaginative Writing Others in Creative Arts and design	W6 - Cinematics and Photography W8 - Imaginative Writing W0 - Creative Arts and design W7 - Crafts W9 - Others in Creative Arts and Design
Education	Teacher training	Training Teachers	X1 - Training Teachers
	Education other than teacher training	Research and Study Skills in Education Academic studies in Education Others in Education	X2 - Research and Study Skills in Education X3 - Academic studies in Education X0 - Education X9 - Others in Education
Combined	Combined	Combined	Y - Combined