

## **SCONUL WORKING GROUP ON QUALITY ASSURANCE**

Notes on the fourteenth meeting, SCONUL Secretariat, 12 October, 2000.

### **Actions agreed at this meeting**

1. Elizabeth Heaps would attempt to open liaison with the Institute for Learning and Teaching.
2. Scott Robertson and Ian Winkworth would complete redrafting of the OFSTED materials.
3. Jeremy Atkinson would circulate news of QAA developments via the relevant e-mail lists.
4. Michael Breaks would enquire of Scottish institutions about their initial experiences of Academic Review and report back to the Group.
5. Howard Nicholson would enquire of SCONUL Executive via Toby Bainton whether the Group could make its Web pages available to the public, outside the members' pages, or not.
6. Jeremy Atkinson would make proposals for the Group's future membership to the SCONUL Executive.
7. Nik Pollard agreed to liaise with the Standing Conference of Heads of Media Services about covering teaching accommodation and equipment within the revision of the *Aide-memoire*.
8. Nik Pollard would attempt a first revision of the *Aide-memoire* and draft a covering letter for the QAA.
9. Jeremy Atkinson would continue liaison with Nicola Channon/Peter Milton at QAA, with particular regard to the revision of the *Aide-memoire*.

### **Notes on discussion**

1. **Present**  
Alison Alden (UCISA, University of Warwick)  
Jeremy Atkinson (University of Glamorgan)  
Michael Breaks (Heriot-Watt University)  
Elizabeth Heaps (University of York)  
Howard Nicholson (University of Bath)  
Nik Pollard (Kingston University)  
Scott Robertson (HCLRG, University College, Chichester)  
Apologies were received from Ian Winkworth (University of Northumbria).

2. The Chair welcomed Michael Breaks back to membership of the Group.
3. **Minutes of the meeting of 2 May, 2000**  
The minutes were confirmed, subject to the correct spelling of Elizabeth Heaps' name in Minute 4 (3).
4. **Action list from the thirteenth meeting**
  5. Ian Winkworth and Scott Robertson had circulated the draft OFSTED materials to SCONUL/HCLRG members, for comment, on 8 June, 2000. The redrafting of their report was on-going.
  6. Jeremy Atkinson would report verbally to members of the Group on his meeting with Nicola Channon, 9 May, 2000.
  7. Nik Pollard had initiated review of the Group's *Aide-Memoire*. A paper was before the meeting.
  8. Ian Winkworth had circulated to SCONUL and UCISA the extracts about learning resources from the 1996-1998 Subject Review reports.
  9. Was on the agenda.
  10. Was pending.
5. **Other matters arising**  
*QAA's Guidelines on the Quality Assurance of distance learning*  
  
John Heaps (Leeds Metropolitan University) had prepared a report for UCISA, a copy of which was tabled. The report of the SCONUL Task Force on Access was expected in November 2000.
6. **HEFCE/QAA matters**
  - (i) Jeremy Atkinson's meeting with Nicola Channon (QAA), 9 May, 2000  
  
The meeting had been held at the time of the circulation of the new *Handbook for Academic Review*. Nicola Channon had expressed support for the idea of the Group providing input to the training of Academic Reviewers, particularly via a revised *Aide-memoire*. Nicola Channon confirmed that consideration was being given to thematic reports, as had been reported to the Group by Elaine Dunphy at the previous meeting, but Nicola knew no details.  
  
Half of the subjects under Academic Review now had benchmark statements agreed for them. The QAA recognised the fine balance that existed between a subject-led approach and the opportunity for a generic/common approach in areas such as learning resources. Nicola Channon confirmed that the benchmark

statements would themselves be subject to periodic review, but that this process had yet to begin. There would also be further codes of practice.

Continuation Audit would continue until December 2001, by when almost all institutions will have been audited. Continuation Audit would be replaced by Institutional Review from January, 2002. Any institutions that had not been subject to Continuation Audit would be first in line for Institutional Review.

The new process of Academic Review was currently starting in Scotland. Wales had asked for a delay and England and Wales would begin Academic Review in the 2001/02 session. Jeremy Atkinson reported that observation of teaching is now optional under the new method.

Jeremy Atkinson had asked Nicola Channon about the relationship between Academic Review and inspections by other public and statutory bodies (PSBs). Nicola Channon reported that various models were being looked at for the optimal timing of these processes.

Nicola Channon was happy for the Group's *Aide-Memoire* to be reviewed and resubmitted, which the Group welcomed.

Jeremy Atkinson undertook to circulate a report of developments to the relevant e-mail lists.

(ii) *QAA Handbook for Academic Review*

The Group noted that pages 16, 32 and 42 contained the main sections of relevance for Learning Resources. Importantly, it was noted that Learning Resources now includes staffing and staff development, as well as elements such as teaching rooms, technical support staff, etc, which had previously been included. Again it was noted that there are no weightings for these various elements.

It was thought that the recommended question for Reviewers, "Is there a strategy for Learning Resources?", could be met by reference to other strategic statements, e.g. the institution's strategies for teaching and learning, information and communications technology, library collection development, or whatever.

(iii) National qualifications framework

The growing groundswell of opposition within institutions to the QAA's proposals for a national qualifications framework was noted; both the '94 and Russell Groups had made representations. It was agreed that the Group and SCONUL did not need to respond to the consultation.

(iv) *QAA Code of practice for career education, information and guidance*

This new code of practice was noted.

- (v) Points to be raised in future liaison with Nicola Channon

It was agreed that the main thrust should now be an agreed revision of the *Aide-memoire*.

7. **English quality matters**

It was generally agreed that the visible upwards drift in TQA scores was the result of improved handling and presentation within institutions. There was suspicion that TQA assessors were generally becoming more elderly, or retired, but no evidence could be established to prove this. Most institutions now realised how important the *Self Assessment Document* (SAD) was, but involvement of staff with responsibility for Learning Resources was still uneven between institutions.

8. **Scottish quality matters**

It was too soon to report on the new method for Academic Review. Michael Breaks undertook to make enquiries about the initial experiences within Scottish institutions and report back to the Group.

9. **Welsh quality matters**

There was nothing further to report.

10 **SCONUL Web site**

Howard Nicholson reported that he had liaised with Wayne Morris and that they recommended that the “Useful links” page should be developed first, but that the Group’s other ideas for the site would have to put forward to the SCONUL Web Weavers Group. It was hoped that the “Useful links” page could include a direct link to and from the UCISA pages for the mutual convenience of UCISA and SCONUL members.

The Group discussed whether the Group’s pages needed to be within the secure perimeter of the SCONUL site’s members’ pages or not. It was agreed that this question should be referred to the SCONUL Executive for a policy decision.

11. **Membership of the Group**

Howard Nicholson and Nik Pollard had asked to stand down from membership. Michael Breaks agreed to take over the Secretary’s role from Howard Nicholson and the SCONUL Secretary had other volunteers for membership. Jeremy Atkinson agreed to consider the vacancies and volunteers in light of the geographic, old/new university and expertise factors and would submit proposals for the Group’s membership to SCONUL Executive.

Howard Nicholson and Nik Pollard agreed to attend one further meeting, to allow for some continuity.

12. **Co-operation with CONUL**

Nik Pollard relayed a request from CONUL for an exchange of papers and possible joint membership. It was agreed that the costs of this should be investigated and that a plan for the most cost-effective way of achieving the desired liaison should be determined.

13. **Working papers on institutions' practices for TQA**

Nik Pollard had received a suggestion that the Group should pull together a volume of working papers on institutions' procedures for handing TQAs. Alternatively the Group might organise an event on the same theme. It was agreed to defer following up this suggestion until the new Academic Review methodology was more widely established.

14. **Revision of the *Aide-memoire***

The Group agreed that the revision should reflect page 42 of the new *Handbook*. The greater emphasis on a "strategic approach" was noted. There was concern amongst the Group about covering the issues such as accommodation and teaching equipment within the revision. Nik Pollard agreed to liaise with the Standing Conference of Heads of Media Services (SCHOMS).

It was agreed that Nik Pollard would make a first attempt at a revision, together with a covering letter for the QAA, which would then be seen by Alison Allden, before being circulated in draft to the Group. It was agreed that this was quite urgent.

15. **Date of the next meeting**

The next meeting was proposed for 15 May 2001; the date and location would be consulted further with members, new and old, by e-mail.

Howard Nicholson  
1.12.2000