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Impact of the Teaching Quality Information initiative on higher education institutions

Report to HEFCE by Alan Brickwood & Associates

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For some, the timing of our requests, especially for detailed costing information, proved difficult - coinciding for them with both end of year accounting tasks and the effects of industrial action. To those who provided us with that information, under those circumstances, we are especially grateful.

We are also grateful to the Chair of the Quality Assurance Framework Review Group (QAFRG), Dame Sandra Burslem, and to Graeme Rosenberg and Emma Creasey at the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) for their support and assistance throughout the course of the study.

Throughout this report we have used the term Teaching Quality Information (TQI) to mean the TQI website and its various components, comprising a range of information supplied by the HEIs themselves, the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and the results from the National Student Survey (NSS) as defined in HEFCE reports 02/15¹ and 2003/51². Where we wish to refer to one of the elements of TQI, we refer to, for example, 'the summaries of the findings of external examiners', 'summaries of teaching and learning strategies' or the 'NSS', as appropriate.

¹ *'Information on quality and standards in higher education - final report of the Task Group'*. HEFCE 02/15. March 2002.

² *'Information on quality and standards in higher education – final guidance'*. HEFCE 2003/51. October 2003.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

SUMMARY

Introduction

- 1 The study team has consulted with a relatively large number of people within higher education institutions (HEIs) in England and Northern Ireland. This has included members of executives, those responsible for managing and administering the Teaching Quality Information (TQI), and students. We have also spoken to a wide range of partner and stakeholder organisations and groups including the Back-End Users Group (BUG), the Higher Education Academy, the Higher Education and Research Opportunities portal site (HERO), the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC), National Union of Students (NUS), Quality Assurance Agency for higher education (QAA), Standing Conference of Principals (SCOP), the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) and Universities UK (UUK)³. In total 160 people were interviewed, mostly face to face on an individual or group basis, during the period February to June 2006. Only a very small number of interviews were conducted over the telephone.
- 2 All interviews centred upon the following four questions we were asked to investigate:
 - a. What are the potential positive impacts on HEIs of the various elements of TQI/NSS?
 - b. What are the potential negative impacts on HEIs of the various elements of TQI/NSS?
 - c. In the light of the above, in what ways could the TQI specification and website be made more cost effective and useful from the perspective of HEIs? Are there any further suggestions for improvements?
 - d. What are the costs of TQI – both financially and in resources such as staff time?
- 3 Upon completion of the fieldwork interviews in the HEIs we held two seminars – one in London and the other in Liverpool – to which we invited representatives of all HEIs in the UK, and partners and stakeholders. The purpose was to give feedback on what we believed respondents from the sample of 13 HEIs had told us, and to provide an opportunity for them, and others not involved in the fieldwork, to react to those findings and provide further input. Those findings were presented in a relatively brief paper⁴ that was sent to delegates in advance of the seminars. A total of 103 delegates attended, of whom around 80 were new and making an input for the first time.
- 4 We estimate the total number of people contributing to this study to be around 250, including those who provided written contributions.

³ A listing of acronyms used in this report is included in Annex 6.

⁴ *'Emerging Themes from the Study of the Impact of the TQI on HEIs'*. A paper prepared by the project team. May 2006.

- 5 Everyone consulted was fully supportive of the three objectives of TQI⁵:
- a. To provide students and other key stakeholders with good information so that they can make informed choices.
 - b. To provide public accountability for quality and standards.
 - c. To ensure a lightness of touch, so that the burden on HEIs is reduced to the minimum consistent with proper accountability and meeting information needs.

However, very few believed that the TQI, in its current form in terms of content, functionality and presentation, would fully achieve all those objectives.

- 6 At the close of the first seminar held in London, and attended by around 70 people, the Chair⁶ summarised the feedback from delegates, acknowledging:
- varying degrees of frustration and scepticism felt widely across the sector with TQI, in its current early state of development;
 - the necessity for its purpose and primary audience to be clarified;
 - that it had to be redesigned to deliver against purpose and be relaunched.

She also differentiated between:

- quantitative data that was broadly supported by the sector, providing it was easily understood and accessible;
- qualitative data such as external examiner reports, learning and teaching strategies and programme reviews that delegates felt should be removed from the site. This is not because they are unimportant. On the contrary, they are essential to the sector but not to the audience to which TQI should be directed.

Finally she highlighted a need to remember that one of the intentions of TQI was to lighten the burden upon institutions whilst providing rigorous public accountability - rather than investing more resources to try to ameliorate the site.

- 7 That summary was subsequently presented to, and broadly agreed by, those attending the second event in Liverpool.
- 8 Most respondents acknowledged that two years after its inception, but only a few months after the launch of the TQI website⁷, it was far too early to make any reliable judgement on its impact upon HEIs. Nevertheless there were already some strong indicators of both

⁵ 'Quality assurance in higher education'. A joint HEFCE/UUK/SCOP/QAA consultation document'. July 2001. HEFCE 01/45.

⁶ Dame Sandra Burslem, also Chair of QAFRG.

⁷ www.tqi.ac.uk Launched in September 2005.

'positives' and 'negatives' upon which action could be taken to develop and improve the TQI.

- 9 Some of these indicators are therefore not strictly 'impacts'. They are perceptions that have been relayed to us by a relatively large number and wide cross-section of people within HEIs. They are certainly having an early influence upon HEIs' assessment of impact. We therefore believe these perceptions to be valid within this study and especially within a context of limited 'hard information' due to the timing of this study so soon after the launch of TQI.

Positives

- 10 The 'positives' included the following, but it needs to be stressed that HEIs are not deemed to be the prime beneficiaries of TQI. Benefits for HEIs are therefore a bonus and of a secondary nature.
- a. A very welcome reduction in the overall burden upon institutions, and an associated reduction in costs, compared with previous arrangements that included subject review in its final form. Two institutions estimated that for them the scale of that reduction was in the order of 30-40%.
 - b. The NSS. All HEIs are taking the NSS seriously and for many it had caused, or is causing, the institution to reappraise, improve and take a complementary view of student satisfaction surveys more generally⁸.
 - c. The NSS attracted the greatest enthusiasm from most of the student union representatives we spoke to, who believed it was already proving to be a real and positive benefit for students. They described examples where it had improved their ability to be heard and to contribute more effectively to decision making that affected them.
 - d. HEIs perceived the potential for TQI to become an influential aid for professional advisers in schools, colleges and in careers services, if not directly for potential students themselves⁹.
 - e. The prospect of TQI becoming, over time, a welcome independent, impartial and stable source of information against which HEIs could compare aspects of their performance against other providers and, as a consequence, improve planning processes, including marketing.
 - f. Being a driver for beneficial change. We were told by many, responsible for managing and administering TQI, how it had been significant in getting their institution to think hard about making beneficial change to some of their existing procedures, or accelerate changes already in place. These included the general

⁸ Institutions participating in the study reported very substantially increased costs associated with NSS activities in year two compared with the first year of the survey. These higher costs are expected to continue in year three of NSS. (See Table 2.2 on p51.)

⁹ This aspect of the impact of TQI is being studied as a separate strand of research within the Quality Assurance Framework review: see Open University/Ipsos MORI report, "TQI website: qualitative user evaluation".

collection and management of data; the electronic submission of reports; the development of websites dedicated to the collection, processing and monitoring of external examiners' reports; and revised, tighter, control over some administrative functions.

Negatives

11 By contrast we were given the following 'negatives':

- a. There is a lack of clarity over the purpose of TQI, the range of intended users and how they can best be served. That range of users is fairly broad. Each group has its own particular interests and requirements, and needs to understand clearly what might be useful, especially how TQI differs from other sources of information such as HEIs' own websites and information required for audit purposes. At present TQI is attempting unsuccessfully to serve all these users without any differentiation.
- b. That TQI is thus far failing to deliver to its main target audience of potential students and their advisers¹⁰. The principal reasons given by most were that the content of the site was incomprehensible to external readers and that its functionality and design were poor. They argued that the site is not 'user friendly', due largely to the re-badging of extant information, designed and originally intended for different purposes.
- c. As a consequence of this 'failure to deliver', and the reduction in effort required and reduced cost compared with subject review, most members of executives and senior managers spoke about how the status initially given to TQI had been downgraded from an initial assessment of equivalence to subject review. Most now referred to having a 'wait and see' attitude, whilst maintaining what they regard to be a minimum 'compliance' level of engagement.
- d. Most respondents from all staff constituencies within HEIs spoke of the failure of HESA-based data from the Student Record, as presented on the TQI website, to represent their provision in a way that mapped onto academic programmes. This gave a distorted, if not negative, impression of their institution because HESA data records information by broad subject of study under the Joint Academic Coding System (JACS) and that, for the purposes of TQI, only the most basic subject classification has been used. These problems affected all types of institution, large and small, and especially institutions with small student cohorts, joint honours and multidisciplinary programmes, and those with a strong interdisciplinary ethos.
- e. The current 'box ticking' part of external examiner reporting is understood to satisfy basic accountability for quality and standards but, beyond this, most respondents from all constituencies believed it to be highly dubious, laborious and expensive. Most described the textual summaries provided by external examiners as bland and, where supplied, of little value.
- f. Similarly, most members of executives and managers questioned the value of much of the qualitative information HEIs were required to provide for inclusion on the website. The information must be presented in a manner that facilitates comparison,

¹⁰ See footnote 9.

and they felt that this obscured important differences between institutions with significantly different missions seeking to appeal to different student markets. The qualitative information includes, in addition to external examiner comments, teaching and learning strategies, and periodic programme and department reviews.

- g. Current arrangements for England and Northern Ireland are dissimilar to those in Scotland and Wales. The latter do not include external examiner reporting, and it was felt that this disparity of information was unhelpful to UK-wide recruitment.
- h. All HEIs reported significant increases in workload in those parts of their organisation that had responsibility for TQI, largely because the extra work had often been absorbed by a wide variety of departments - many of which had not previously been engaged in quality assurance and subject review. Just two of the sample of 13 HEIs reported the appointment of additional staff dedicated to TQI. Two institutions from the sample, that had previously participated in the TQI pilot, both said that compliance with TQI had been significantly more onerous than participation in the pilot study had indicated. The scope of this study did not enable us to collect information on a consistent basis for all institutions about where complementary savings in staff time had occurred since the demise of subject review¹¹.
- i. All those responsible for managing and administering TQI spoke of their frustration from the outset with changing specifications and with technical and functional problems in routine tasks of uploading information onto the website¹².

Improvements

12 Respondents offered a number of suggestions for improvement:

- a. A necessity to clarify the intentions of TQI and the needs of the different users, and to introduce changes that can accommodate those differing needs taking into account other sources of information. A further strong suggestion was to differentiate between those users in how they are received, guided and presented with information on the website. The range of users is fairly broad and includes potential students, professional advisers, staff within HEIs, employers and the international community.
- b. Provide links from TQI to other sources of information, especially UCAS, to facilitate the user 'search journey'.
- c. Provide clear health warnings on the site as to its limitations.
- d. Some managers referred to a need to clarify the ownership of TQI.
- e. If TQI is to be redesigned and relaunched to become a more vital player in the HE information landscape, those responsible for it will need simple and good monitoring information upon which to make decisions. At present it is not clear to respondents whether effective monitoring has been agreed or put in place.

¹¹ However, two institutions gave us estimates suggesting that for them the scale of the reduction of staff time across the institution as a whole was perhaps 30-40% compared with subject review in its fullest form.

¹² This may be one reason why institutions reported significant set-up costs, especially for the qualitative information requirement, continuing into year two of TQI (2005/06). See Table 2.2 on p51.

Costs

- 13 Our study has concentrated on identifying the direct costs that institutions were able to attribute to the activities they undertook in support of TQI and NSS in 2004/05 and 2005/06. We also asked them to estimate costs for TQI and NSS activities in 2006/07, compared with those for 2005/06 (and assuming no operational changes to either NSS or TQI in 2006/07 compared with the requirements for 2005/06).
- 14 To the direct costs for TQI and NSS activities reported by institutions, we added 25% to reflect institutional overhead charges, specifically the associated premises costs¹³.
- 15 We found considerable variation of practice in the introduction and implementation of TQI and NSS between the 13 institutions included in our study, and we would expect this diversity to be representative of the range of practice across the sector as a whole. The range of total direct costs incurred in 2004/05 for TQI including NSS was from £5,000 to £153,000¹⁴.
- 16 To date, 12 of the 13 institutions have produced final and complete returns of the pro-forma used to collect costings data¹⁵.
- 17 To calculate the costs to the sector (ie to all 135¹⁶ HEIs in England and in Northern Ireland), we have grossed up the actual costs reported by these 12 institutions by the 25% premises charge and then applied a factor of 11.25 (135/12).
- 18 The total costs of implementing TQI and NSS for the sector derived from this study for the first three years of operation, distinguishing between set-up costs and recurrent costs to institutions, are reported in Table 1.1 below.

¹³ Analysis of the nature of these activities suggested that premises charges were the only substantive overhead element appropriate to this study, since the majority of institutions in the study did not disaggregate central institutional charges and any levy for premises costs within the institutions we visited was not based on full economic costs.

¹⁴ In 2005/06 the range was from £4,500 to almost £148,500 and in 2006/07 from £2,000 to £143,500.

¹⁵ This pro-forma and the guidance given to institutions on how to calculate their returns on a common basis are attached at Annex 7.

¹⁶ Number of HEIs in England and Northern Ireland returning HESA data in 2004/05.

TABLE 1.1 Sector costs of implementing TQI and NSS

	SECTOR COST (£000s)		
	Yr 1 (2004/05)	Yr 2 (2005/06)	Yr 3 (2006/07 estimated)
Set-up	4,122	1,340	45
Recurrent	2,479	7,033	7,330
TOTAL COST	6,601	8,373	7,376*

* Discrepancy due to rounding

- 19 From this it is possible to calculate the average (mean) cost per institution of £30,500 for start-up costs and £18,400 for recurrent expenses in year 1 (2004/05). While institutions expect set-up costs to have fallen virtually to zero by 2006/07 (year 3), assuming no major changes to the information requirement, they expect that recurrent expenditure will by then be around £54,300 per institution.
- 20 This compares with early estimates of the average annual cost per institution of TQI (excluding the NSS) of £24,000 for set-up and £24,000 for recurrent costs¹⁷. Following further analysis of the report data, and discussions with JM Consulting about their work on this aspect of the QAF, we have revised their calculations to give an average annual cost per institution for TQI **including NSS** of £28,000 for set-up and £28,000 for recurrent costs.
- 21 However, these estimates were made before any of the activities had gone live. In practice, institutions appear to have decided, especially in the light of publicity surrounding publication of the first NSS data, that they needed to devote more resources to work in support of the NSS. We found that direct costs of the NSS nearly doubled between 2004/05 and 2005/06¹⁸.
- 22 By far the largest cost to institutions was staff time. Based on the returns from institutions in our stratified sample, we calculate that for the sector as a whole in England and Northern Ireland, staffing costs comprise 97% of the direct costs of operating TQI and the NSS, and 78% of total costs, which include the 25% uplift for premises costs.
- 23 We have considered staff costs for operational activities associated with introducing and running the TQI, separately from the senior management staff costs involved in planning for the operation and impact of TQI (including NSS) within the institution. These figures (which exclude the 25% uplift associated with premises costs) are shown in Table 1.2 below.

¹⁷ 'The costs and benefits of external review of quality assurance in higher education'. Report by JM Consulting Ltd to HEFCE, Universities UK, SCOP, the DfES and the Quality Assurance Framework Review Group, HEFCE July 2005, p39.

¹⁸ See Table 2.2 on p51 for detailed figures.

TABLE 1.2 Staffing costs of implementing TQI and NSS

	STAFFING COST¹⁹		
	(£000s)		
	Yr 1 (2004/05)	Yr 2 (2005/06)	Yr 3 (2006/07 estimated)
Central strategy costs	1,682	2,108	1,597
Operational costs	3,390	4,380	4,176
TOTAL STAFF COST	5,072	6,488	5,773

24 The data suggest a small but steady fall in the proportion of total staffing costs spent on central strategy, from around one-third to some 28% by the third year. This relative decline in senior management staff costs is to be expected, as the activity becomes more embedded across the sector.

¹⁹ Excludes 25% uplift for central premises costs allocation.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO QAFRG

- 25 In arriving at our recommendations to QAFRG, we have considered carefully the views of the different constituencies within HEIs and of HEFCE, HERO and other partners and stakeholders – all of whom recognised the initial findings and emerging themes we presented at the two seminars. No one expressed any surprise at what we presented to them. Most endorsed these findings and emerging themes and provided further evidence by way of support and refinement.

Recommendation 1

- 26 Clarify the purpose of TQI, the range of users it intends to serve and how that can best be achieved, taking into account other sources of information. At present TQI is attempting unsuccessfully to serve a wide range of users without any differentiation.

Recommendation 2

- 27 Employ a more suitable method of presenting the provision within HEIs. That method will need to accommodate and accurately present the diversity and distinctiveness that exists within the sector, including size. The current use of JACS codes is simply failing to provide good, accurate and representative information upon which users can make informed choices.
- 28 Representatives of HEIs need to enter into discussions with HESA and other key players such as HEFCE and UCAS to decide how the JACS subject classification can better be used to the advantage of TQI, or whether there is an appetite for finding a radical alternative.

Recommendation 3

- 29 Until a more suitable method of presenting provision can be developed, some improved explanation of the limitations of TQI data needs to be provided. A 'health warning' is needed on why certain datasets are not comparable, why information is not available for individual programmes, and the 'shelf life' of some data. It should also be clear that the absence of information for technical reasons does not imply any negative connotations about that provision.

Recommendation 4

- 30 The continued inclusion of external examiner reports, as the means of providing public accountability for quality and standards, should be reviewed. Almost all we spoke to questioned the value of this component to users and pointed to the high costs of providing it.

- 31 There is also an inconsistency with TQI for Scotland and Wales which does not include external examiner reports. This inconsistency is unhelpful to UK-wide recruitment.

Recommendation 5

- 32 TQI needs to be redesigned to make it more 'user friendly' with improved navigation, transparency and appeal appropriate to the needs of diverse intended users.

Recommendation 6

- 33 Relaunch TQI - possibly with a more suitable name.

Recommendation 7

- 34 Provide links from TQI to other sources of information, especially UCAS, to facilitate the user 'search journey'.

Recommendation 8

- 35 Clarify the 'ownership' of TQI and especially how decisions affecting its current priorities and future plans are taken and how the interests of HEIs are represented. Many we spoke to seemed to believe, incorrectly, that it is owned by the QAA.

Recommendation 9

- 36 A transparent and explicit system for monitoring of use is required.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

THE NEW QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK

37 HEFCE has a duty under the 1992 Act to ensure the quality assessment of HE provision. Until recently it discharged this duty by commissioning the QAA to undertake teaching quality assessments through a cycle of subject reviews²⁰ and periodic institutional audits. Subject review was generally unpopular across the sector – it was considered onerous, stressful and expensive. A complete cycle of subject-level review, undertaken between 1993 and 2001, had generally demonstrated high quality and standards across the sector. So in 2001, to reduce unnecessary burden on institutions, the UUK Standards and Quality Group engaged directly with the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), Ministers, the QAA and HEFCE to argue for radical change. The Group's main arguments were that the amount of 'unsatisfactory' provision in HE was negligible and that the opportunity cost of the system was infinitely greater than any benefit. HEFCE agreed with UUK, SCOP, the DfES and the QAA, to move to a revised quality assurance framework (QAF).

38 It was also decided that HEIs should provide transparent and comparable public information, as part of their public accountability, that was:

- of value to students and potential students;
- of value to parents and their advisers;
- potentially, of value to future employers of students.

This, with other information of a quantitative and qualitative nature, was all to be put into the public domain. There was also some debate about how student feedback could feature and whether the publication of outcomes of HEIs' own student satisfaction surveys would suffice. But eventually the introduction of a new national student survey was decided upon to ensure comparability.

39 A Task Group, chaired by Professor Sir Ron Cooke, then Vice Chancellor of the University of York, was set up in 2001 to find a mechanism to implement these requirements.

40 The revised QAF is premised on institutions' own responsibilities for monitoring, reviewing and publishing information about quality and standards. External assurance is secured through audits of the soundness of HEIs' internal systems and procedures, carried out by the QAA. HEIs receive individual institutional audits; these are supplemented by collaborative provision audits for those HEIs with large or complex collaborative provision. The revised framework is jointly owned by HEFCE and the sector, and QAA audits are jointly commissioned by them.

41 As part of the revised QAF, the Task Group developed specifications for information about quality and standards that should be routinely published, known as teaching quality

²⁰ Subject reviews were also known as 'teaching quality assessment'.

information (TQI). The purpose of TQI within the revised QAF was to make available accurate and up-to-date information about the quality and standards of HE provision to potential students and other stakeholders.

- 42 The TQI dataset was developed following consultation with the sector and was piloted in six HEIs prior to being fully rolled out. It consisted of a set of quantitative and qualitative data published for all HEFCE-funded HEIs. This was based largely on existing data and reports, but included the introduction of a new national student survey (NSS) to provide student feedback on the quality of the learning and teaching in each HEI.
- 43 The revised quality assurance processes were implemented through a transitional cycle between 2002 and 2005, in which each HEI underwent institutional audit that was, in most cases, preceded by developmental engagement. The TQI site and the NSS were developed and implemented from 2003 to 2005, and the TQI site was launched in September 2005²¹.

REVIEW OF THE NEW QAF

- 44 In 2002, the Better Regulation Task Force (BRTF), set up to reduce the public accountability burden imposed on HEIs, recommended that the impact of the new QAF should be evaluated two years after implementation. HEFCE, UUK and SCOP accordingly established a QAF Review Group (QAFRG), chaired by Dame Sandra Burslem, to evaluate the costs, effectiveness and impacts of the revised QAF, and to recommend any changes to the framework that could further reduce costs or improve effectiveness in the longer term.
- 45 The review is taking place in phases. Phase 1 focused on the impacts, benefits and costs of QAA institutional audit during the transitional cycle, in order to recommend improvements for the next cycle of audits. The outcomes and recommendations from this phase were published in July 2005²² and were incorporated in the QAA's revised method for institutional audit.
- 46 Phase 2 of the review is currently concerned with the public information aspects of the QAF, ie TQI and the NSS. (Review of collaborative audit will also be part of phase 2 but at a later stage.) The QAFRG is seeking evidence about the effectiveness and impact of TQI (including the NSS) on its users, on HEIs and on other stakeholders. Research is divided into three strands:

²¹ See www.tqi.ac.uk

²² 'Review of the Quality Assurance Framework: phase one outcomes'. HEFCE 2005/35.

- a. This study - the impact of TQI on the HEIs that provide it (Alan Brickwood & Associates).
- b. The usefulness of TQI to potential students and their advisors (Ipsos MORI and the Institute of Educational Technology at the Open University).
- c. Employers' information needs with regard to HE, and how TQI contributes to this (School of Education, University of Sussex).

47 The three research strands are scheduled to report to the QAFRG in the summer of 2006. The group will publish its conclusions and recommendations in the autumn of 2006.

48 In addition, the QAA has conducted a one-off sector-wide review of 'the accuracy, integrity and frankness' of information provided by HEIs on the TQI website. That review incorporated desk-based analysis by QAA, round-table discussions with representatives from HEIs, auditors and audit secretaries, and audit case studies. QAA will also be reporting to HEFCE in the summer of 2006.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- 49 The QAFRG asked us to examine and produce findings on the following with regard to the impact of TQI (including the NSS) on HEIs:
- a. ***What are the potential positive impacts on HEIs of the various elements of TQI/NSS?*** These might include encouraging improvements in quality, providing useful information and improving the student experience.
 - b. ***What are the potential negative impacts on HEIs of the various elements of TQI/NSS?*** These might include the necessity of changing established procedures (particularly with regard to external examiners), risks to reputation, and impacts on existing student surveys.
 - c. ***In the light of the above, in what ways could the TQI specification and website be made more cost effective and useful from the perspective of HEIs? Are there any further suggestions for improvements?***
 - d. ***What are the costs of TQI – both financially and in resources such as staff time?*** This to distinguish between set-up and recurrent costs.
- 50 These questions were to be addressed not just for TQI overall but for the different elements of TQI as described in HEFCE reports 02/15²³ and 2003/51²⁴, and were to include an HEI's collaborative provision (though not directly involving partner institutions or organisations). The different elements are:
- summaries of the findings of external examiners;
 - summary of the HEI's learning and teaching strategies (as presented to HEFCE under the Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund programme);
 - summary statements of the results of, and actions taken in response to, periodic programme and departmental reviews;
 - summaries of its links with relevant employers; how the institution identifies their needs and opinions; and how those are used to develop the relevance and richness of learning programmes;
 - an explanation of the external examination structure at the institution (optional for HEIs);
 - results of the NSS;
 - programme specifications (possibly via links from the TQI website);

²³ 'Information on quality and standards in higher education - final report of the Task Group'. HEFCE 02/15. March 2002. (Recommendations.)

²⁴ 'Information on quality and standards in higher education – final guidance'. HEFCE 2003/51. October 2003. (Following consultation, provided final guidance.)

- other relevant reports (via links from the TQI website).

51 The processes of HEIs providing quantitative data to HESA and information on programmes funded by the NHS, the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) and private closed programmes were to be excluded from the project. Further education colleges that provide HE were similarly excluded from the project.

OUR APPROACH

THE SAMPLE

52 A stratified sample of 13 HEIs was agreed with the QAFRG as follows:

University of Birmingham
University of Brighton
University of Cambridge
Cumbria Institute of the Arts
De Montfort University
University of Durham
University of East Anglia
Goldsmiths College
University of Greenwich
Leeds Metropolitan University
University of Liverpool
College of St Mark & St John
University of Ulster

53 This comprised six pre-1992 universities, five post-1992 universities and two HE colleges. Seven of these are large (more than 20,000 student headcount), three medium (10 to 20,000) and three small (less than 10,000), of which one is very small (less than 5,000).

54 The sample also included institutions located in major conurbations, smaller towns/cities, and more rural locations; some with one major site and some operating from more than one campus, including sites in different towns/cities; institutions with significant provision outside the TQI, notably in health and teacher education; some institutions with predominantly UK-wide student recruitment, and some with significant local/regional recruitment; and institutions with significant numbers of part-time as well as full-time undergraduate students.

55 Five of these HEIs participated in a previous study²⁵.

56 All nine regions of England plus Northern Ireland were included in the sample.

INTERVIEWS

57 An initial approach was made to a contact at each HEI, supplied by HERO, who was usually the most senior person with operational responsibility for TQI and typically the head of a quality office or deputy academic registrar. All knew about the study from a letter²⁶ issued by HEFCE, and all readily agreed to participate. Most were pleased to have the opportunity to have an input to improve the TQI.

58 Based upon experience with other reviews of a similar nature, we developed a 'generic aide memoire' to ensure consistency of content and approach in all interviews, and as a basis for a variety of communications with different types of interviewee. In advance of the

²⁵ See footnote 17.

²⁶ HEFCE Circular Letter 01/2006.

interviews, a short briefing note was sent to all contacts in a form suitable for them to disseminate to their colleagues, with a single page summary of topics to be addressed in the interviews.

- 59 A first set of pilot interviews was conducted at the University of Birmingham in February.
- 60 In our dealings with the HEIs, we took the advice of our prime contact on the people we should speak to, but generally met with a similar set of people to include:
- the most senior person on the executive responsible for quality assurance of teaching ;
 - the most senior person(s) with operational responsibility for the TQI and for the NSS;
 - staff dedicated to the processes of providing and maintaining TQI and NSS data;
 - marketing, and other staff, responsible for student recruitment;
 - students' union representatives.
- 61 In some HEIs we met with groups of senior academic staff with responsibility for tasks such as writing programme summaries and dealing with external examiners' reports. In just one HEI we were unable to meet with a member of the executive and, in one other, there were no student representatives available due to their being away on vacation but they subsequently submitted a written statement.
- 62 A particular characteristic of this study has been the breadth of people consulted within the HEIs. This has resulted in a correspondingly wide range, and sometimes contrasting, spectrum of information provided: from 'big picture' strategic and long-term perspectives from members of executives, through to very detailed information from relatively junior staff on their experience of their institution's operational interface with TQI.
- 63 From the outset we decided upon a dual approach, where the identification of cost-driving activities would be obtained from the academic and administrative staff we would be meeting during the interviews, with the actual costs of those activities being provided later by a separate approach to finance staff.
- 64 Our approach to the sample HEIs was tempered by a desire to be flexible and minimise the burden upon them. We therefore tended towards not providing substantial briefing papers that could discourage collaboration. However it seemed, soon after we started the interviews, that we had erred on the side of too little advance information. We found respondents were not readily identifying some of the activities we suspected could contribute to costs. For example, respondents seemed to be taking meetings of various kinds for granted and not mentioning them. As a consequence, we produced an additional template which gave an improved cue to what we were seeking with regard to costs, and was used by us to note the cost-driving activities we believed we had been told about. We used this, via a further iteration, to form an agreeable basis for getting the detailed costings subsequently.
- 65 From the information institutions sent us about their cost drivers for the first year of implementation of TQI and NSS, it was clear that very few had conducted detailed

analyses of their own set-up and operational costs. We discussed the overall picture emerging from these responses with JM Consulting, both in the light of their previous study of the costs and benefits of the QAF²⁷, and their current project to apply full economic costing within the Transparent Approach to Costing (TRAC) and to develop a TRAC methodology for costing the overall teaching and learning activities of institutions.

- 66 This was to ensure that we could make meaningful comparisons between the estimated costs for TQI and NSS calculated by JM Consulting and the actual costs for the first year of operation reported by those institutions that had participated in both studies. More importantly, it was also to confirm that the calculations for the overall sector derived from the project would continue to have currency in subsequent years because they would be understood in terms of the TRAC for Teaching methodology.
- 67 As a result of these discussions and in the light of the information about cost drivers received from institutions, we piloted with the University of Birmingham a pro-forma that gathered headline costs for TQI and NSS across a three year period, with guidance notes to ensure that data would be reported in a consistent manner by each institution. These were circulated by email to the lead contact and the TRAC accountant at each institution²⁸.
- 68 In the case of non-staff costs, institutions were able to translate the information they had previously prepared for the cost drivers paper directly onto the costings template, according to the appropriate activity summary line and year as specified. However, because institutions had presented us with a range of ways of calculating their costs for staff time spent on TQI/NSS, we asked them to group the various staff costs identified on their cost drivers paper into a simple but consistent format to ensure that all figures were returned on a consistent basis²⁹. From these returns we were able to calculate total sector costs for the introduction of TQI and NSS across a three year period (based on actual figures returned for 2004/05 and 2005/06 and estimated data for 2006/07).
- 69 Upon completion of the fieldwork interviews in the HEIs we held two seminars – one in London and the other in Liverpool during the latter part of May – to which we invited representatives of all HEIs in the UK, partners and stakeholders. The purpose of those seminars was to give feedback on what we believed respondents from the sample of 13 HEIs had told us, and to provide an opportunity for them, and others not involved in the fieldwork, to react to those findings and provide further input. Those findings were presented in a relatively brief paper³⁰ that was sent to delegates in advance of the seminars. Attendance at the two seminars totalled 103 delegates, which included around 80 to whom we had not spoken previously.
- 70 We also spoke to a wide range of partners and stakeholder organisations and groups including the Back End Users Group (BUG), the HE Academy, HERO (the organisation

²⁷ See footnote 17.

²⁸ A copy of the costing data pro-forma is at Annex 7. This distinguishes between quantitative data (referred to as 'HESA TQI data'), NSS activities and qualitative data.

²⁹ Essentially we asked institutions to distinguish between clerical or junior administrative staff activity and more senior administrative staff activity for 'doing the job', and to separate this from policy overview activities, which we called 'steerage'. We also asked them to distinguish set-up costs from recurrent costs for all activities.

³⁰ *'Emerging Themes from the Study of the Impact of the TQI on HEIs'*. A paper prepared by the project team and circulated to delegates. May 2006.

funded to host and develop the TQI website), HESA, Ipsos MORI (the company engaged to conduct the NSS), JISC, the NUS, the QAA, SCOP, UCAS and UUK.

- 71 In total 160 people were interviewed face to face on an individual or group basis during the period February to June 2006. Of these 139 were from HEIs, the remainder being partners and stakeholders. Only a very small number of interviews were conducted over the telephone.
- 72 Taking into account people attending the seminars that we had not spoken to previously, the total number of people providing an input to this study is around 250.
- 73 All interviews were conducted under 'Chatham House rules' in that we gave assurances that we would use information provided by respondents but not in a manner that could be traced back to them individually.

FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

74 In this section we present the findings from our interviews with respondents in the 13 HEIs, with partners and stakeholders, from inputs by delegates at the two seminars, and from written material sent to us following the interviews and seminars. The findings include the outcomes from a number of iterations with specialist finance staff within institutions on costings for the 'cost-driving activities' identified during the main interviews within the HEIs. These were in response to the four questions we were asked to investigate³¹:

- a. What are the potential positive impacts on HEIs of the various elements of TQI/NSS?
- b. What are the potential negative impacts on HEIs of the various elements of TQI/NSS?
- c. In the light of the above, in what ways could the TQI specification and website be made more cost effective and useful from the perspective of HEIs? Are there any further suggestions for improvements?
- d. What are the costs of TQI – both financially and in resources such as staff time?

75 We have clustered our findings under five broad headings. The first three of these are similar to the underlying objectives of TQI, the fourth was to include a number of findings that were of importance but which did not necessarily fit under the other three, and the fifth covers the information we have been given on costs.

- a. The provision of good information to enable informed choice.
- b. Public accountability for quality and standards.
- c. Lightness of touch and reduction of burden upon HEIs.
- d. Other impacts.
- e. Costs of TQI.

Within these five headings, we have further clustered the findings under a number of themes into which we believe the information, views and experiences provided by respondents naturally fall.

76 Where appropriate, we have attempted to differentiate between different groups of people within the text, and to provide a measure of the relative responses we got from them, through the use of terms such as 'a small number', 'many', 'most' or 'all'. There were four distinct constituencies of HEI respondents, who we found to hold differing views on quite a number of issues:

- members of executives;
- those responsible for managing and administering the TQI;

³¹ See p17 for the aims and objectives of the study.

- students' representatives;
- specialists with responsibility for TQI, TRAC or cost accounting more generally, usually located within finance departments.

77 Everyone consulted was fully supportive of the three objectives of TQI³²:

- To provide students and other key stakeholders with good information so that they can make informed choices.
- To provide public accountability for quality and standards.
- To ensure a lightness of touch, so that the burden on HEIs is reduced to the minimum consistent with proper accountability and meeting information needs

However, very few believed that the TQI, in its current form in terms of content, functionality and presentation, would fully achieve all those objectives.

78 At the close of the seminar held in London on 23 May 2006, and attended by around 70 people, the Chair³³ summarised the feedback from delegates acknowledging:

- varying degrees of frustration and scepticism felt widely across the sector with TQI, in its current early state of development;
- the necessity for its purpose and primary audience to be clarified;
- that TQI had to be redesigned to deliver against purpose and be relaunched.

She also differentiated between:

- quantitative data that was broadly supported by the sector, providing it was easily understood and accessible;
- qualitative data such as external examiner reports, learning and teaching strategies, programme specifications and programme reviews that delegates felt should be removed from the site. This is not because they are unimportant. On the contrary, they are essential to the sector but not to the audience to which TQI should be directed.

Finally, she highlighted the need to remember that one of the intentions of TQI was to lighten the burden upon institutions whilst providing rigorous public accountability - rather than investing more resources to try to ameliorate the site.

79 That summary was subsequently presented to, and broadly agreed by, those attending the second event in Liverpool later that week.

³² *'Quality assurance in higher education'*. A joint HEFCE/UUK/SCOP/QAA consultation document. Published in July 2001. HEFCE 01/45.

³³ See footnote 6.

- 80 Most respondents acknowledged that two years after its inception, but only a few months after the launch of the TQI website³⁴, it was far too early to make any reliable judgement on its impact upon HEIs. Nevertheless there were already some strong indicators of both 'positives' and 'negatives' upon which action could be taken to develop and improve the TQI.
- 81 Some of these indicators are therefore not strictly 'impacts'. They are perceptions and they have been relayed to us by a relatively large number and wide cross-section of people within HEIs. They are certainly having an early influence upon HEIs' assessment of impact. We therefore believe these perceptions to be equally valid within this study, and especially within a context of limited 'hard' information due to the timing of this study so soon after the launch of TQI.
- 82 At the seminars all recognised the initial findings and emerging themes we presented to them. No one expressed any surprise, and most endorsed these and provided further evidence by way of support and refinement which we have incorporated into the following summaries.

³⁴ www.tqi.ac.uk Launched in September 2005.

THE PROVISION OF GOOD INFORMATION TO ENABLE INFORMED CHOICE

Clarity of purpose

- 83 Many respondents from all constituencies pointed to a lack of clarity over the purpose of TQI: not so much that there had been any deficiency in original intent, but more the way that it had developed over the previous year or so to become something largely devised by the sector for the sector. What concerned them was a sense that no one seemed to have given much priority to the site having appeal for potential students – the supposed primary user group. They described the current situation with TQI ‘pointing in all directions’ - attempting unsuccessfully to serve a wide range of users without any differentiation.
- 84 That range of users is fairly broad. It includes potential students of all kinds and especially those from non-traditional backgrounds, professional advisers, staff within HEIs, employers and the international community. All have their own particular interests and requirements and need to understand clearly what might be useful to them, and especially how TQI differs from other sources of information. Respondents described a need for TQI to become much more vital for users, especially within a marketplace that was becoming increasingly competitive. They described the current content of TQI as ranging across information that was:
- of value or potential value to HEIs, with statistics mostly directed towards staff. This is welcome and needs to be developed further;
 - of value or potential value to students – the NSS being potentially useful (also to staff) but ‘*diabolically difficult to do comparisons*’;
 - of little value. Examples given were the periodic programme and departmental reviews and learning and teaching strategies, in addition to external examiners’ summary reports.
- 85 Most respondents considered it important that the intentions of TQI be clarified and communicated quickly, preferably coincident with a redesign and a proper relaunch that took into account the different interests of targeted user groups.
- 86 The concept of a user’s ‘search journey’ was introduced at the London seminar by one breakout group, to identify the process of users searching for the information they required, often from a number of different sources. This pointed sharply to a necessity to position TQI alongside other complementary information sources such as UCAS, the site containing information on funding and bursaries for students³⁵, the British Council, and HEIs’ own websites. It reinforced strongly a suggestion, from many we spoke to, that TQI should enhance its links to those other information sources and especially to UCAS.
- 87 During interviews, members of executives and managers told us about a development where an increasing number of HEIs were striving to open up their intranets, not just to committed applicants, but also to potential students. This, they believed, could have a significant impact upon the future positioning of TQI and needed to be taken into account in its development.

³⁵ www.direct.gov.uk/EducationAndLearning/UniversityAndHigherEducation/StudentFinance/fs/en

- 88 A further strong suggestion for improvement was the need to provide differentiation between the different users in how they are received, guided and presented with information on the website. Different and dedicated pathways were advocated.
- 89 Several respondents referred to an ambiguity in the relationship between audit and TQI, especially concerning information that HEIs need to have and make available to QAA, and that which they need to publish to comply with their obligations to TQI. We refer to this later³⁶.
- 90 A few respondents suggested a goal for TQI might be for it to make the existing newspaper league tables substantially redundant. They argued that the sector suffered from a fluctuating demand from students, unsettled funding, and a marketplace influenced by league tables that change with huge variability according to the needs of the newspaper owners' to improve circulation. Having a stable set of objective and impartial data should be a welcome alternative.

Content

- 91 Whilst respondents accepted the principles underlying the TQI, most we spoke to at executive and managerial levels within HEIs considered those parts of TQI that required them to provide qualitative information, to enable potential students and others to make informed choices, to be highly problematic and dubious. This was because information was required in a manner that facilitated comparison and this, in turn, obscured important differences. The more HEIs were pressed into presenting information in a similar way, the more institution X began to look like institution Y, despite their probably having significantly different missions and seeking to appeal to different student markets. A lack of distinctiveness and a tendency to homogenise was felt by many to be resulting in everything supposedly being 'excellent'.
- 92 In a similar vein, most of those same respondents questioned the value to target audiences of external examiner reporting. Accountability for quality and standards was, for most, a matter of reassuring the public that standards were 'satisfactory' or perhaps 'good', not about trying to present information that might lead people to think they can make a judgement that one institution was 'better' than another. 'Comparative quality' was a very different issue, requiring a much more complex set of performance indicators that took into account the mission of respective HEIs.
- 93 External examiner reporting, with its very bland summary textual comments, was considered by most to add little information of interest to potential applicants or current students, to be of questionable value and very labour-intensive for HEIs to produce.
- 94 Respondents expressed a wide range of differing views on whether TQI should provide more detailed information or whether it should stay with its largely 'headline' approach. Getting the right balance of interest and information for young people was considered important. Too much, too detailed information will 'turn them off'; too little will frustrate them. Many of those we spoke to with responsibility for marketing and recruitment felt that what is needed is a broad brush picture, one which shows the HEI is taking topics such as quality, standards and employability seriously and which is a first point of reference that

³⁶ See paragraph 140.

can be followed up if necessary. They thought that rough indicators should normally suffice but it needed to be clear to the reader what to expect and what the information comprises. Again, better links to other relevant websites were advocated.

- 95 Many referred to the need for some clearer explanation of the limitations of TQI data: a 'health warning' on why certain datasets are not comparable; why information is not available for individual programmes; the shelf life of some data; and that absence of information for technical reasons does not imply any negative connotations about that provision. Also, where information has been conflated in order to meet thresholds for publication, this needs explaining.
- 96 Many respondents said that the one important feature that differentiated TQI from other sources was the status and simplicity of the information it provided. Information was derived from non-negotiable national sources, was objective, independently obtained and had not been interfered with in any way. Any attempts to improve the effectiveness of the site for users must not undermine the integrity of this information.
- 97 Many executive and managerial respondents acknowledged the potential for TQI to extend its coverage into additional areas, on a regular or occasional basis. One suggestion, accepting differences in teaching methods and norms between subjects, was information on student teaching group sizes and contact hours. This, it was argued, would be a revealing indicator upon which to compare the quality of the student learning experience. However it was rejected at the seminars as being very much a 'step too far' as it might lead to notions, inappropriate to UK HE, of 'time served' and because of the difficulties in providing comparable information. Other suggestions made were that TQI and NSS could move beyond the generic, at least to some extent, by creating a framework for institutions to include additional material about themselves and to add questions of their own to the NSS questionnaire. This, it was said, could facilitate better connections with institutions' own more focused information and student satisfaction surveys.
- 98 Others suggested that the site could be used for relaying simple but important messages of a neutral nature, such as a simple guide to HE in the UK. Another example proposed by several was that of communicating the purpose of HE and how it is distinctly different from school – embodying intellectual curiosity, challenge, different disciplines, seeing things in a different way, and the developments around intersections between subject disciplines.
- 99 Discussions in some of the breakout groups at the seminars on expansion of content, and of various areas in which this might develop, tended more towards caution. Delegates urged a containment of TQI to a limited core of dimensions that it could deliver well, not lots of things badly, and certainly for the time being until it was better established and proving its worth.
- 100 We found little evidence relating to the inclusion of periodic programme and department reviews and other policy reports on the site. For many HEIs such reports were infrequent, for others they had yet to upload these. These items, along with external examiner reports, characterised a serious concern expressed by most respondents about the problem of 'two audiences', where much of the material has been prepared for quality assurance purposes and specialist audiences, not for prospective students. It is therefore

not surprising that this extant information has either to undergo a complete transformation or end up being incomprehensible or irrelevant to the prospective student audience. The BUG group, in a written submission, pointed to this as an example of the confused purpose of the site: is it an information source for prospective students or a source of information for QAA to 'police' HE? BUG believes TQI is all about the former but that many of the problems arising are linked to its use as the latter³⁷.

- 101 Similarly, any future developments will need to take into account a move by HEIs to allow fairly deep access to their intranets by potential students. Several respondents reported upon their own plans, and those of others, that will result in potential students soon being able to gain an insight into the nature of the student experience on offer – timetables, sample timetables and assessment schedules, etc. Respondents believed these developments will escalate across the sector and become a significant benefit for students.
- 102 Given that the student recruitment market is still UK-wide, inconsistencies in the data for institutions in England and Northern Ireland compared with those in Wales or Scotland was seen as unhelpful to applicants, by both staff and student union respondents. External examiner reporting did not feature in Scotland and Wales, and in Scotland participation in the NSS was not required – although some Scottish HEIs were opting-in for this year. TQI currently includes quantitative information describing Department of Health, TDA, postgraduate and part-time provision; however the related qualitative information is subject to local HEI discretion. Respondents assumed this situation to be temporary but pointed to a partial and skewed picture being presented in the meantime.
- 103 Several commented on the potential for more sophisticated responses from taught postgraduate students responding to an NSS survey on student satisfaction, due to their increased maturity and experience of HE.
- 104 Many of those responsible for managing and administering TQI became involved, during their preparations for the interviews, in trying to obtain data on the use of TQI, but found only minimum arrangements had been agreed and put in place for monitoring. Those arrangements comprised the provision of overall site usage statistics by HERO to the TQI Funders Group at regular national meetings, and reports from HERO to the QAA regarding completeness of institutional profiles. The availability of any more sophisticated and disaggregated monitoring information describing usage of sections of the site and institution-level monitoring has been limited and not explicitly stated. In addition, the intention to provide institution-level monitoring data had been set as a low priority by the Funders Group when reviewing the short-term developments on the site in 2005/06. Most respondents were disappointed to discover this and felt it to be a serious deficiency that should not be permitted to continue. They wanted to see monitoring data that included 'hits' in total, by subject and for other material both at national level and by institution. Without this they believed the national data could be meaningless due to the diversity of provision and patterns of behaviour in the sector. If TQI is to be redesigned and relaunched to become a more vital player in the HE information landscape, it was clear to many respondents that those responsible for it, inside and outside HEIs, would need an improved system that provided more detailed monitoring information upon which decisions

³⁷ See paragraph 140 below.

could be made about future priorities and direction for TQI – quite apart from the value that information would have for institutions.

Delivery to target audience³⁸

105 By far the most common ‘negative’ reaction was that the TQI had thus far failed to effectively address its target audience of potential students and their advisers. The principal reasons given by most were that the material on the site was incomprehensible to external readers, largely due to the re-badging of extant information designed and originally intended for a different purpose, and that the site was not ‘user friendly’ due to poor design.

‘Professionals talking to professionals with the media listening in’ was how one respondent described the TQI, having been designed by the supply side of the sector, for itself.

106 Other reasons given centred around TQI being founded upon a false assumption that potential students were sufficiently sophisticated to be able to use it or had any real interest in its content, but most accepted the importance of the adviser as sophisticated user. Many questioned whether end users, or their proxies, could have been effectively consulted in its development.

107 The other main reason given was the seeming lack of any effective marketing of TQI, other than to HEIs themselves. This many felt to be a fundamental shortcoming but, ironically, a small number thought the situation might now, with the benefit of hindsight, be advantageous as it would allow more effective marketing of an improved TQI as if for the first time.

108 Most respondents within HEIs described their various experiences of both existing and potential students being largely uninterested if not unaware of the existence of TQI – except for aspects of the NSS. Respondents from two institutions, in advance of meeting with us, undertook some specific investigations and reported feedback from applicants questioned, about where they had found out about the institution and the programme they were applying for. Despite prompting, none said they had used the TQI website.

109 During the course of the study, data became available that demonstrated a very low level of usage, as illustrated by low numbers of ‘hits’ on the TQI website, since its launch in September 2005 and similarly very low ‘hits’ on individual HEI websites via links from TQI. This low level of usage in itself did not concern respondents, who generally considered it far too early to make any proper assessment, especially in circumstances where no marketing to target audiences had taken place. The main concern, however, was that low usage might continue if significant changes were not introduced.

110 Whilst admitting general awareness of the TQI amongst potential students was poor, a small number of student union officers referred to a range of benefits that could become significant in the future. These included:

³⁸ See footnote 9.

- an ability to review the history of grades actually accepted by HEIs for entrants (rather than the 'desired' grades promoted on other websites). This, they suggested, could become a serious factor for some students in determining final choice;
- a general rise in interest and engagement with the TQI by professional advisers to potential students.

The National Student Survey

- 111 By far the greatest enthusiasm was expressed by student union representatives for the NSS and for the public reporting of its results. Specific data on their own NSS results had provided weight to arguments for internal change and the opportunity to make comparisons between institutions. Above all they felt it was the publicity for NSS results that meant issues of concern to students could not easily be ignored. In some institutions we heard a substantial divergence of opinion: with staff criticising the NSS for its poor design and limited value, compared with student union officers' praise for a development that was proving to be a positive benefit to them in the promotion of their student member interests.
- 112 Despite that divergence of opinion, the NSS is generally regarded to be the one part of TQI that is at present 'vital' and does attract a relatively high level of support across the sector. One of the breakout groups at the London seminar referred to the NSS as '*the one bit of TQI that almost everybody is content with*'.
- 113 Institutions that achieved a high response and high ratings from the NSS were very positive about the results accurately reflecting their institution. Those with a low response and/or low ratings took the situation equally seriously and were keen to take action to try to prevent any recurrence. Many members of executives and managers made connections between high ratings and high response rates, on an assumption that a low response would most likely be biased towards negativity. They also made a further connection from their own results from NSS to the amount of effort they had put into supporting and encouraging it within their institution. Some suggested that they had been fortunate in the positive results they had got as they had paid little interest and put little effort into it³⁹.
- 114 From the outset we were led to believe from articles in the press that there might be pockets of concerted effort to manipulate the NSS so that impressions of an institution could, in turn, influence the currency of degrees awarded to students. We found no evidence of such manipulation other than a reported intention by some members of the Aldwych Group (an association of student unions from Russell Group universities) to persuade others to influence NSS responses last year and create a boycott of it this year (see also paragraph 159).
- 115 Most student unions expressed their opposition to any move away from conducting the NSS on an annual cycle, though some managers within institutions argued for a biennial

³⁹ As noted previously, institutions reported very substantially increased costs associated with NSS activities in year two compared with year one of the survey, which are expected to continue into year three (see Table 2.2 on p51).

cycle to enable them to conduct broader internal student satisfaction surveys in alternate years.

- 116 Most respondents drew our attention to a serious lack of visibility for specific sub-groups of the student population, such as part-time students, due to the algorithm(s) behind the datasets. A smaller number of respondents also drew our attention to the exclusion of postgraduate students. The question of postgraduate students being included in the survey population for the NSS was considered by the NSS Steering Group, but it was decided that if this were to be done it would most likely require a separate survey altogether, using a different questionnaire, and at a different time of the year.

The use of JACS coding

- 117 Whilst the provision and processing of quantitative data between institutions and HESA were excluded from our terms of reference, the processing of that data within the institutions for the purposes of TQI was not. This featured highly as a 'negative' in responses we got from all within HEIs, excepting only representatives of student unions.
- 118 Most respondents spoke of the failure of TQI quantitative information to properly represent their provision, and of the distorted, if not negative, impression this was creating of their institution as a consequence of the way the JACS coding system was being employed. They presented us with a catalogue of criticisms of the system adopted by TQI, which used a limited set of JACS code headings (19 in 2004/05 and 41⁴⁰ subsequently). This they believed to be a serious flaw in TQI because it fails to provide users with good information upon which they can make informed choices. The criticisms included:
- a. The HESA Student Record uses JACS codes to indicate overall student numbers according to a broad subject classification. It does not capture information about academic programmes. Whilst the JACS subject classification can operate at a significant level of detail, for the purposes of TQI only a basic subject classification has been used. This may result in provision that spans a number of key disciplines being reported only in one generic subject area, making it difficult to gain information relating to a specific programme. Thus students wishing to gain information about a particular programme may enter a specific name into TQI but will receive information that is generalised to a broad subject category.
 - b. Misleading impressions are given in that the website apparently shows some HEIs as offering programmes that they do not, and does not allow them to show programmes that they do offer. This problem arises where an HEI offers joint or major/minor courses where one of the subjects can only be studied as a combination with another subject. The way to solve this might be to report each combination separately but this will run into the problem of small numbers.

TQI does not accommodate small student cohorts or joint honours programmes. This can be a problem for large HEIs as well as small ones. In one case a national centre of excellence in a multidisciplinary area of study virtually lost its identity; and in another institution its provision in 32 out of a total of 41 coded

⁴⁰ See Annex 5.

areas could result in their featuring in only six due to progressive cut-offs. As one respondent reported: *'This can have the effect of skewing data to such an extent that resulting information is virtually meaningless. For example, the university does not have courses in agriculture and yet a postgraduate taught programme in biological sciences is listed under this heading. Environmental sciences, one of the university's flagship areas, reports some courses under physical geography and environmental science whilst others (because of the presence of meteorology) appear under physical science. The codes do not therefore permit universities with a strong inter-disciplinary ethos to present TQI information accurately.'*

This problem is acknowledged by those responsible for operating the HESA Student Record. However it would seem there is no simple solution that can avoid the tension between very tight subject/course groupings and needing sufficient numbers to make the statistics sensible – other than moving either in time (aggregating years) or space (broader subjects, as now) to mitigate this. Neither solution is ideal.

- c. The JACS codes are used by UCAS as well as HESA. They are meant to facilitate comparisons across HEIs offering similar subjects, but this assumes that institutions adopt similar principles in the assignment of codes. This may not always be the case. Also, JACS codes denote subjects, not programmes or departments, whereas external examiners' reports are mainly based upon programmes and for the purposes of TQI have to be aggregated or grouped in some way to fit into the JACS codes and reflect subjects. UCAS also uses the codes differently, and this all makes it difficult for an applicant to make a connection between UCAS information on courses and the TQI JACS data on subjects.
- d. Criticism was made of the threshold requirements specified for inclusion of NSS data by subject on the TQI site. Setting a threshold of both 50% of all students, and at least 30 student responses, necessitates a minimum of 60 students in each JACS area. For small subject cohorts even 70% of responses may be inadequate for them to meet the threshold of 30 respondents. The statistical validity of this threshold was questioned, and a number of respondents (including statisticians) suggested that a threshold of 50% of all students and 20 students (requiring 40 students per JACS area) would be statistically valid and enable appropriate distinction between separate programmes within the same JACS area. We understand this is currently under investigation.
- e. Limiting the use of the more detailed NSS data on the NSS dissemination site to internal communications, for data protection and other reasons, was reported as unhelpful. And whilst it is accepted that it would be helpful to remove some of the rounding and cohort size limitations from the data, there are constraints under the Data Protection Act and the assurances given to students about anonymity.

119 In general, respondents had little to say about HESA data itself. Their concern centred upon its unsuitability for the TQI environment, the limited number of headings used from the JACS coding system and, for a significant number of respondents, problems of a specific nature about the use of data from the HESA student record on the TQI site. Many

of these problems related to the treatment of students who were following programmes other than three year full-time undergraduate degrees. They include, for example, full-time students on vocational sub-degree programmes or part-time students on short courses or low intensity modules, such as those on discrete adult education programmes, who may appear to be studying the same programmes as full-time undergraduate students since they appear in the same JACS subject category.

- 120 By contrast, and not denying the limitations of the current use of JACS codes, we were advised by HESA and HERO that some of the difficulties HEIs suffered, and had brought to our attention, were probably as a consequence of 'poor' data supplied by HEIs themselves in the past; certainly some of the examples given to us probably fell into this category. This had provoked several institutions to review the quality of what they were supplying to HESA and make improvements with regard to the detail and accuracy of their student data. In such instances, these improvements can only benefit the respective HEIs, and the sector more generally, as financial modelling gets more sophisticated in the future.
- 121 Several respondents drew attention to a consultation conducted by HESA, in collaboration with HEFCE, concerning the development of the HESA Student Record⁴¹. This offered an opportunity for HEIs to make representations about their concerns over TQI, but the changes that emerge will not take effect for several years because of the length of the data gathering and publication cycle. It is this that causes problems for HEIs: using HESA data for a purpose for which it was not intended, with publication on the TQI site, means that data from institutions that is already several years old is put on the site, and any changes that HEIs do make to their reporting for the HESA Student Record will not show on the TQI site for a number of years. HEFCE does require a classification system for funding purposes but that is not necessarily the same as a need to link cognate parts of a programme together. This is why there is concern within the system about the collection of data for one purpose (informing funding decisions based upon the teaching funding methodology) and the use of it for quite another (publication on the TQI site which appears to be, even if it is not claiming to be, providing information about subjects of study). Depending upon how a programme is taught, the 'media studies' part of what applicants might consider to be an art and design specialism could show up in 'computing' (animation).
- 122 Whilst few respondents were clear as to what might be an alternative solution, we consider that representatives of HEIs need to enter into discussions with HESA and other key players such as HEFCE and UCAS to decide:
- whether there is a real appetite for finding a radical alternative to the current use of JACS codes for the TQI site, or
 - how the capacity of the current JACS subject classification to operate at a significantly higher level of granularity can be exploited to the advantage of TQI – a development to which there is already a commitment for possible implementation in 2007⁴².

⁴¹ 'Redevelopment of the HESA Student Record – second consultation'. HESA Circular 06/03. March 2006.

⁴² At the seminars held in London and Liverpool, a presentation was made by HEFCE indicating developments for 2006 and 2007 that, subject to QAFRG, include the possibility of an increase in TQI subject headings from 41 to 107 in 2007.

Design and marketing

- 123 Many respondents referred to the lack of any effective marketing of TQI to date beyond the HE sector itself; and to the need, once its purpose had been clarified, for TQI to be redesigned and relaunched as quickly as possible, especially to the advisers of potential students in schools and colleges – who are potentially influential ‘translators’.
- 124 Almost all spoke of the need for TQI to be more attractive and user friendly. Many said that it should accommodate the different needs of the intended range of users, with improved navigation, transparency and appeal appropriate to them, including the use of appropriate language. It must cease to use HERO or QAA ‘speak’.
- 125 Several respondents questioned the suitability of the current name and urged a replacement be found.

Freedom of Information Act

- 126 Most HEIs monitor both the number and nature of requests they receive under the Freedom of Information Act and, whilst many predicted increases, no one reported any significant connection of a positive or negative nature, as yet, between TQI and the Act. One respondent drew our attention to the potential for the results of not just the NSS but other student satisfaction surveys to fall within scope of the Act. Most respondents said that they had, to date, received relatively few requests for the disclosure of information.
- 127 Following the seminars, at which the prospect of discontinuing external reporting was widely discussed, one HEI raised the possible implications for institutions under the Freedom of Information Act if external examiner reporting was excluded from the TQI site. It was suggested to us that such a move could remove a current exemption HEIs enjoy due to TQI being a ‘publication scheme’ within the terms of the Act, but this is not so. The publication of summaries might reduce the incidence of requests but does not remove the right of people to ask for the full examiners’ reports under the Act.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY FOR QUALITY AND STANDARDS

External examiner reporting

- 128 The inclusion on the TQI site of external examiners' reports attracted the greatest criticism, with most respondents arguing that the current process of examiners ticking boxes and providing bland summary textual comments was an inordinately laborious and expensive method of complying with a need for public accountability for quality and standards. Most believed this aspect of the TQI required serious reconsideration as to whether it was actually needed.
- 129 We report elsewhere (paragraph 170) a general acceptance of the need to move towards the electronic submission of external examiner reports in the interests of efficiency, but not all respondents were comfortable with this. Several senior managers spoke of a culture of external examining that tends to exist within pre-1992 universities that is personalised, not standardised according to any pre-determined format, and of the discomfort many external examiners had expressed about needing to comply with something that felt very 'detached' and 'public'. Those that pointed to this disquiet suspected some of the problems were 'generational' but nevertheless believed electronic submission and the use of dedicated external examiner websites to manage the process could result in a loss of examiners willing to serve, and a reduction in the quality of reporting. One institution used electronic submission from external examiners only for information required for TQI. Another institution said that if the TQI requirement for publication of external examiners' reports ceased then it would dismantle the IT system developed for the submission of these reports since it primarily served TQI purposes, was costly to maintain and did not meet the institution's own preferences for handling this material.
- 130 We were informed that a review, undertaken by the Higher Education Academy in 2005, revealed that just under 30% of the published external examiner reports do not contain any textual summary comments. This finding came from an examination of the first tranche of external examiner material to go on to the TQI website for 'Business and Related Subjects' entries from 106 HEIs. Specifically:
- 22 contained textual summaries with five or more bullets;
 - 54 contained textual summaries with fewer than five bullets;
 - 30 contained no textual summaries.
- 131 In addition, a few of the first two groups were found to have a statement that '*The institution cannot be held responsible for any decisions made on the basis of information and views contained in this report*'. Those with reports often had cryptic references to process, for example, '*the balance of papers rule*' or acronyms such as '*MABs*' and '*PABs*'. One institution gave six responses to issues not raised in the external examiner's textual summary, and there were other examples of this. The HE Academy concluded, on the basis of these findings, that this part of TQI is unlikely to inspire confidence.

Demise of subject review

132 Whilst there was no doubt by anyone that the introduction of the new quality assurance framework, to include TQI, had greatly reduced the burden upon institutions and reduced costs⁴³, not everyone was wholly dismissive of subject review and the system that had preceded TQI. Two significant points were raised by a small number of respondents responsible for managing TQI within HEIs:

- a. The first of these centred upon a changed dynamic that had been detected between academic and support staff since TQI. This they thought had arisen from a break-up of a long established relationship whereby academic staff held responsibility for quality and standards and administrative staff provided the professional support to them – in terms of intelligence, stability, continuity, management and administration. Academic and support staff had traditionally worked well together as a team but now that had changed, and with it had been lost the spirit of that relationship along with what some referred to as a loss of purpose – “*jumping through hoops for the sake of it*”.
- b. The second point was more general in that respondents regretted the demise of subject review largely on the grounds that with it had been lost the value of assessment by external peer review, which had in turn been a very effective driver for internal improvements in quality.

Conflicts with quality assurance processes

133 A small number of executive and management respondents referred to the TQI presenting a challenge to the integrity of their otherwise acceptable internal quality assurance systems, and of a consequential need to make undesirable adjustments to those systems. Some of those changes involved a reduction in devolved responsibility for administration to schools and departments, due to the need for tighter controls to minimise risk. Others centred upon incompatibility and a need to realign internal processes that had previously sought to differentiate ‘quality’ from ‘standards’, and especially their review of standards that occurred on a less frequent than annual basis.

134 Another point that arose, mostly in debate during the seminars, was the extent to which TQI requirements had adversely influenced external examiner reporting. Several managers and administrators who dealt with these reports spoke about a noticeable shift towards a reticence by external examiners since TQI, not just in that part they provided for publication, but in the way they wrote their fuller and ‘traditional’ reports more generally.

135 We were unable to revisit this with the HEIs and establish any evidence, but learnt from the HE Academy of investigations it had conducted in 2005 which supported the comments we received at the seminars. The HE Academy found external examiners expressing concern that their role as critical friend is, at worst, in jeopardy and at best compromised by the publication of their comments. They feel that this is inhibiting what they write in the commentaries, and that they are inclined to be more positively disposed towards an HEI in the summaries than they might have been in an unpublished report. The HE Academy found strong indications that external examiners are more likely to be

⁴³ As noted earlier, two institutions estimated that for them the reduction of staff time across the institution as a whole was perhaps 30-40% compared with subject review in its fullest form.

frank and open during discussions at the HEI than in anything they might write for publication. Hence, in this sense the role of critical friend is retained. The information content of the summary textual reports is therefore restricted and whilst the overall picture that is provided is of a job well done, the reader does not get a feel for what is underneath this. It is rare for such a textual summary to be critical. There is a concern that any negative comments, which might previously have been offered in the spirit of constructive criticism, could now be taken out of context and be published in the press, with a risk of misinterpretation, misrepresentation and adverse impact on the reputation of an HEI. This created a general reluctance amongst external examiners to write anything that might lead to such a situation. They said they would be more comfortable with a more comprehensive 'tick box' report.

Periodic and departmental reviews

- 136 We found little evidence relating to the inclusion of periodic programme and department reviews and other policy reports on the site. For many HEIs such reports were infrequent, for others they had yet to upload these.
- 137 Most however commented on papers having been prepared principally for one (internal) purpose having to be rewritten for a lay audience that is unlikely to gain much from them.

Confidence and trust

- 138 The Vice Chancellor of Liverpool John Moores University, during his brief welcome address to delegates at the Liverpool seminar, referred to a weakness in the system that perpetuated an inappropriate climate of suspicion about the quality and standards of higher education in the UK, despite confirmation by the National Audit Office⁴⁴ that the sector was generally of both high quality and low risk. This he argued had the effect of undermining confidence within and outside the sector.
- 139 These comments resonated with many remarks by respondents and delegates at both seminars over the necessity for continuing high levels of accountability. Why, many asked, was it that HE seemed always to have to justify itself? Was there a real crisis of confidence? What was perpetuating this – external suspicion or was it self-inflicted? One respondent, in a follow-up interview, asked which other parts of the wider education system required its examiners to justify their grading.
- 140 On the matter of trust, feedback from BUG referred to TQI being used as a means of accountability and how this was a (mis)use and significant distortion of its purpose. The group argued that it is one thing for the QAA to check what HEIs put on the site to ensure its 'accuracy, integrity and frankness', but it is another thing to have to put material on the site so that QAA can check it – which they considered to be what was happening at present. The QAA can access all internal review reports and external examiner reports without question: it does not need to have summaries put on TQI. Audit not TQI is the means of accountability for robustness of internal quality procedures, and a distinction needs to be made between the respective roles of audit and TQI and especially what

⁴⁴ The 'Single Conversation' Accountability Committee.

information HEIs need to have (and make available to QAA) and what it needs to publish, as described in the original Cooke report⁴⁵.

⁴⁵ *'Information on quality and standards of teaching and learning'*, HEFCE 01/66 (report of the Task Group chaired by Professor Ron Cooke).

LIGHTNESS OF TOUCH AND REDUCTION OF BURDEN UPON HEIS

Initial welcome and commitment

- 141 Most HEIs took seriously the introduction of the TQI at the outset. They understood it to represent part of a 'deal' that would result in a 'lighter touch' quality assurance framework, without subject review. They welcomed this development and the greatly reduced burden upon staff and associated reduction in costs. Although, at the London seminar, several reminded us of the plethora of other funding streams and corresponding quality assurance processes, unaffected by the substitution of TQI for subject review, that they still have to satisfy.
- 142 Many gave consideration to the implications for their institution at a senior level, including TQI within the portfolio of a member of the executive and on the agendas of senior policy-making committees, because they perceived it to be at a similar level of importance to subject review.
- 143 This assessment for most was relatively short-lived. Few claimed to have understood the full implications for their institution at the outset. There was much speculation, and a number of managers responsible for implementing the new arrangements tried to anticipate what the requirements might entail following the publication of HEFCE's report on final guidance⁴⁶. Those that did this became frustrated. Most were disappointed by the seemingly low level of resources provided for the project nationally and, whilst appreciative of the help given by staff of HERO, mentioned the dissemination of conflicting and confusing information and the lack of any effective national 'helpline' in the early stages. This latter point, about a need for support from national agencies over data processing issues, arose during the seminars as a continuing problem that needed addressing.
- 144 Within a relatively short time most of the HEIs that had been positive about TQI began to downgrade its importance and this, in turn, tended to create a sense of ambivalence amongst senior staff within several institutions. In comparison with subject review, TQI was clearly very much less expensive and required much less effort, but otherwise few thought comparisons to be appropriate, now that its shape and nature had become clear. Most senior staff we spoke to referred to now having a 'wait and see' attitude, whilst maintaining what they regard as a minimum 'compliance' level of engagement.
- 145 Many, whilst expressing concern about TQI's failings and its potential for negative impacts on their institution, also believed those failings and the potential for harm to them was not real as long as the TQI remained ineffective and of little interest to potentially important audiences. Their only real fear was a risk to reputation as a consequence of negative reporting by the press, and it was for this reason that effort was largely concentrated upon the NSS.

⁴⁶ See footnote 24.

Additional workload

- 146 Although few institutions reported the need to engage additional staff, many said TQI had nevertheless resulted in increased workloads in areas put under pressure to meet the additional requirements of compliance. In some instances this had, in turn, resulted in a need to abandon other activities, such as internal student surveys. Many blamed this opportunity cost upon a lack of clarity about the actual demands of TQI, once operational, and a lack of funding to meet those demands.
- 147 In more general terms, many of the demands of the TQI on HEIs involve them re-presenting existing material in a different format. Most respondents spoke of key documents prepared for one purpose within their institution but by their nature being wholly unsuitable in that form for an external and lay readership. As a consequence much laborious translation and 'repackaging' was required.
- 148 Beyond those general comments, we found some big differences in the way the TQI had impacted upon HEIs, largely as a consequence of how they had chosen to interpret requirements, prepare and engage⁴⁷. Outstanding examples being:
- a. Whether or not an institution had chosen to summarise their external examiners' textual comments before downloading these onto the site. This was in circumstances where there were multiple examiners, and reports, for particular subjects within a common programme. A small number of respondents described how they had complied with what they understood to be an encouragement by HERO to summarise the textual comments. This, for them, had greatly increased the volume of communications with and between external examiners and school-based staff to secure agreement on those summaries, resulting in several person weeks' work. By contrast, other HEIs that did not summarise the textual comments reported that uploading of all reports for a comparable number of examiners could be completed in a very short time.
 - b. Time taken to verify the Ipsos MORI listing of final year students eligible for the NSS survey was another task that attracted a wide variation of effort – largely depending upon the preparedness of internal student record systems and, to a degree, upon interpretation of the rules. One (smaller) institution concluded that the introduction of TQI and NSS made it imperative to purchase a computer-based management information system to integrate student records with other systems. (Currently it had to match student records with the HESA student printout manually for NSS to produce student contact details.) Although the purchase of a management information system had been contemplated longer term, the first year of NSS had demonstrated this to be an urgent major capital investment.
 - c. Time taken in chasing students to improve the response rate to the NSS varied between extremes of one HEI spending over two person weeks, to another that claimed to spend no time at all on this. All those that spent time on this believed they had benefited from a good response rate in the first round, and most admitted more effort would have to be given if the response fell.

⁴⁷ As might be expected, differences of interpretation and practice are reflected in the wide range of costs institutions reported for implementing TQI. See pp 48-53 for discussion of these points.

- d. In most instances, whilst we found good evidence of collaboration, the majority of work arising from the NSS has been carried by the HEIs' administration, not by the student union.
 - e. Overall managerial responsibility for TQI mostly sat within teaching quality offices or similar sub-sections of academic registries. However, actual and significant workload was often found in a variety of other locations, including planning offices, student records services, student affairs, IT and marketing departments and schools. Schools largely carried a significant burden in institutions where responsibility for quality assurance has been substantially devolved. Due to the lack of any additional staffing appointments in most institutions, that workload had largely been absorbed, often disproportionately spread amongst existing staff.
 - f. In order to make use of results from TQI and NSS, for marketing and promotional purposes and despite its current simplicity, two institutions had bought-in contracted professional editors/copywriters to translate the QAA compliance language of the base texts into language appealing to prospective applicants and their parents.
- 149 Two institutions that had previously participated in the TQI pilot both said that compliance with TQI had been significantly more onerous than the pilot had indicated.
- 150 At the outset of the study we were primed to expect significant beneficial change in the way administrative support departments had reconfigured to deal with TQI, and general benefits from more 'joined up' working. With the exception of one HEI that, due to its structure, had created a dedicated multidisciplinary unit to manage and administer TQI, we found no evidence of any significant structural change of the kind suggested to us.
- 151 Several pointed to predictions that external examiners would refuse to cooperate with TQI, would make the system inoperable and require increased payments but that, in practice, none of these predictions had come true – excepting in two institutions which had increased payments to external examiners as a direct consequence of the additional workload resulting from the TQI requirements.
- 152 Similarly, our attention was drawn to speculation in the media, prior to the launch of TQI, that pointed to potentially damaging consequences from external examiner reports. This had also not happened. Where problems had occurred, subsequent investigations revealed most of these 'potentially damaging reports' had been founded upon misunderstandings. For example, we were told of one external examiner who was adamant in their unwillingness to confirm that *'the standards of student performance are comparable with similar programmes or subjects in other UK institutions'*, but because they believed what they had examined *'was better'*!
- 153 Just two institutions had employed or were planning to employ one additional member of staff each to deal with TQI compliance and /or NSS data analysis. A number had reviewed the job descriptions of established posts and had either varied or planned to vary these specifically to incorporate TQI/NSS duties.

Operational problems

- 154 Almost all we spoke to that had responsibility for managing and administering their institution's interface with TQI told us about problems they had experienced, from the outset, in uploading information onto the TQI website, due to its poor functionality design and as a result of persistent changes to the specification in the early stages.
- 155 Several spoke at the seminars about a lack of consultation by HERO with users over the introduction of changes. An example given was over changes to 'programme headers'. Rather than simply receiving a new delivery by email of these from HERO, and not understanding why they had been sent, institutions would have liked to have been asked first if they would like HERO to produce new programme headers for them, or if they wanted to produce them themselves internally.
- 156 We met with BUG, a group of managers and senior administrators with responsibility for providing and maintaining information for the TQI, at the beginning of this study. They subsequently assisted us by compiling a list of problems (and action taken to resolve these) identified in their meetings over a two year period to March 2006 – derived from relevant minutes of BUG meetings. These we list in Annex 4, albeit that many of these may either have already been rectified or are in the process of rectification.

OTHER IMPACTS

157 A number of additional impacts on HEIs, arising from TQI, were identified by respondents and are presented here for completeness. As we have noted previously, not all of what respondents told us are strictly 'impacts'. They are perceptions that have been relayed to us by a relatively large number and wide cross-section of people, which are having an early influence upon HEIs' assessment of impact. We therefore believe these perceptions to be valid and especially within a context of limited 'hard' information due to the timing of this study so soon after the launch of TQI. In a similar vein, and particularly pertaining to these 'other impacts', it needs to be stressed that HEIs are not deemed to be the prime beneficiaries of TQI. Benefits for HEIs are therefore a bonus of a secondary nature.

The National Student Survey

158 Many student union respondents spoke of issues that they and their predecessors had continued to promote to senior management over time and without success until the advent of the NSS. They believed the results of the NSS, despite its shortcomings, were being taken very seriously by senior management and, as a consequence, had greatly facilitated the job of representing student opinion and securing beneficial changes for students⁴⁸. Examples of issues included timing on the return of assessments (a topic student unions told us had been widely debated but misunderstood by staff), anonymous marking and the introduction of a revised academic calendar – some of the details of which had been opposed by students.

159 We were told of a move by some members of the Aldwych Group, an association of student unions from Russell Group universities, to try and secure a boycott of the NSS; but that a significant number of the membership were unwilling to align themselves to this action as a consequence of their own assessment of the high value of it to their student members. That situation has now changed and we have been updated by the Aldwych Group on their new and positive stance towards the NSS.

160 Detailed and negative comments by staff responsible for administering the NSS included criticisms of the amount of time spent chasing students to get a good response, and inappropriate timing of the survey, despite the choice open to the institution on timing. However, these comments varied enormously across the HEIs we interviewed, dependent upon the stance taken and commitment by the institution, as noted earlier in this report.

161 Despite the positive comments made by those that appreciated the distinctive contribution of the NSS alongside other surveys, several respondents spoke of feedback fatigue beginning to happen, and predicted a drop in response rates this year. Other, more specific reasons given for a reduction in response rates included changes in the approach agreed by Ipsos MORI to not 'chase' students, and potentially lower satisfaction levels generally across the sector as a consequence of the industrial action by AUT/NATFHE staff, notably on the marking of final examination scripts. In particular, Ipsos MORI reported an overall response rate of about 60% in 2005 which was expected to fall to around 56% in 2006. Ipsos MORI reduced telephone contact in 2006 and this resulted in a

⁴⁸ This impression would appear to be confirmed by our analysis of institutions' own costings data. These show a very substantial increase in recurrent expenditure by institutions in the second year of operation of the NSS that is anticipated to continue for year three. See particularly paragraph 187 below.

reduction in telephone interviews from 70,000 to 50,000, despite an increase in email communications.

- 162 In one HEI we found that the NSS and another internal student satisfaction survey were being conducted simultaneously, with the latter on-line and offering prizes as inducements to participate. This was drawn to our attention by the student union as a potentially confusing and unhelpful situation for their members.
- 163 Two institutions reported that with the introduction of NSS they had been forced to abandon their own internal student surveys, because limited staff resource as much as potential student survey fatigue had precluded running both in the same academic year. A few referred to their own surveys having a broader 'satisfaction' coverage compared with the NSS.

Market information and benchmarking

- 164 Most respondents, members of executives, those responsible for managing and administering TQI and student union representatives acknowledged the benefits of getting some useful objective feedback on student satisfaction, often at departmental level, and the opportunity this provided to undertake some benchmarking. One summarised a view expressed by a fairly wide range of respondents that TQI was '*a potentially powerful tool*'.
- 165 Several told us about changes in behaviour that were occurring that included:
- an appetite for more, similarly objective, information that could facilitate more sophisticated benchmarking;
 - a reassessment of existing internal student satisfaction surveys. This combined a desire to reduce feedback fatigue and an acknowledgement of the perceived integrity of NSS as an external and independent source of information. Several respondents reported plans within their institutions to change current arrangements to take account of, and complement, the NSS. One institution reported plans to cease one of its current surveys in favour of the NSS, with resulting cost savings;
 - instigating an internal student satisfaction survey where one had not existed previously.
- 166 One HEI referred to limited but positive plans to use TQI information as basic contextual briefing material in its internal review procedures. The argument was put that most attempts in the past to contextualise performance with internally generated data usually fell foul of wrangling by staff over the accuracy of data provided. TQI information could not be dismissed in such an easy manner and had led to more ready acceptance of indicators that could subsequently be investigated where appropriate. Respondents in other institutions indicated this might have similar benefits for them.
- 167 Several respondents drew our attention to what they believed to be some variations in satisfaction between subject grouping in the NSS, and suggested this might warrant investigation in future years.

Enhancement

- 168 Most respondents dismissed any idea that TQI had itself encouraged any improvements in quality and standards. Some said that neither TQI nor NSS would be better than the assessments institutions could make for themselves, including those promoted by preparation for external scrutiny such as institutional audit. Despite this general reaction, there were many 'positives' that clearly had an indirect impact upon enhancement across a number of areas of activity and we have reported on these elsewhere.
- 169 A few however did take an optimistic view of TQI's potential. They argued, for example, that the NSS could be an important contributor to incentivising teaching in a sector that assessed and valued research much more than teaching.

Improvements in efficiency of operations generally

- 170 Many respondents pointed to secondary, beneficial outcomes from the TQI. They described how it had proved to be a significant driver in getting their institution to think hard about making beneficial changes to some of their existing procedures, or accelerate change already in hand. Examples included:
- a. *The general collection and management of data.* Several of the managers and administrators referred to the way they currently managed data being different for that used internally to that for external purposes, the incompatibility of some datasets, how this was proving increasingly inefficient, and their plans to address and improve both capture and use of data. One respondent echoed much of what we were told with the comment: *'We are starting to become smarter in the handling of data as a consequence of TQI.'*
 - b. *Electronic submission of external examiner reports.* We found a wide variation ranging from three HEIs where none of these reports were submitted electronically, to others where the corresponding percentage of reports submitted electronically was over 90%. Most we spoke to recognised the necessity to get to a position where electronic submission was the norm. Most acknowledged that TQI had proved to be an impetus to accelerating this change.
 - c. *Development of an external examiners' website.* As a consequence of different and more pressured timing over the processing of external examiner reports, some HEIs had initiated or accelerated the development of websites dedicated to the collection, processing and monitoring of external examiner reports. Typically these included a facility for examiners to revise their personal details, receive induction material and download their reports. One in particular also had a tracking facility to alert internal staff that needed to deal with these reports, and provided an ability to monitor how the report and any processing required of it, was progressing.
 - d. *Revised protocols.* Whilst not always presented as a 'positive', some respondents referred to plans to implement what they believed to be necessary changes to enable better central co-ordination of certain functions – usually connected with the processing of external examiners' and periodic review reports. Whilst increasing efficiency of operations, a common 'downside' cited was a degree of removal from schools and departments of delegated administrative responsibility for quality.

Ownership

- 171 Some referred to a need to also clarify ownership. Who owned the TQI – the sector itself, QAA, HEFCE? Where did its authority lie? How were decisions being taken about its current priorities, representation of HEIs' interests and future plans? How was it being led? On commencement of this study we were aware of the then fairly recent extension of the remit of the NSS Steering Group to create a new TQI/NSS Steering Group.
- 172 Many managerial and administrative respondents seemed to have forgotten the origins of the TQI, believing it to be a creation of QAA, and they expressed a degree of suspicion about how QAA might use it in the future. Other commonly expressed concerns centred upon predictions that the QAA would begin to use the TQI as the back door to escalating its influence and thereby renege on the explicit compact of the introduction of TQI for a 'lighter touch'. None offered any hard evidence or convincing indicators but the suspicion was there.
- 173 Another comment of potential interest, and within a context of respondents believing the QAA to be 'responsible' for the TQI, was that *'anything associated with the QAA tends to get gold plated'*.

Certainly many respondents told us that the potential interest of QAA had been a major driver of their level and focus of engagement in some aspects of TQI.

COSTS OF TQI

Introduction

- 174 Within this part of the study, we undertook two separate but related activities. The first was to compare the actual costs of implementing TQI and NSS in the first year of operation with the initial estimates JM Consulting had produced as part of their study of the costs and benefits of the QAF⁴⁹.
- 175 The second and more substantive aspect of the costings exercise involved consideration of the direct costs of activities associated with the introduction and implementation of TQI, including the NSS, at all institutions participating in the present study. Complete costings information was returned by 12 of the 13 institutions. From our analysis of activities and cost drivers within the stratified sample of institutions, we produced sector-wide costing calculations for the introduction and implementation of TQI and NSS for all HEIs in England and Northern Ireland, based on the 12 complete responses received.
- 176 In the light of discussion with all 13 institutions and the information they sent to us about their actual costs of implementing and operating TQI and NSS, it was clear that very few had conducted detailed analyses of their own set-up and operational costs. We therefore developed a simple pro-forma to collect the direct staffing and other costs at a level to which all institutions were able to disaggregate their data. This was at the 'headline' level of the three main component activities included within the TQI requirement:
- quantitative data derived from the HESA Student Record and the Destination of Leavers from HE (DLHE) statistics;
 - quantitative data collected through the NSS; and
 - qualitative data derived from quality assurance related activities (including summaries of external examiner reports, summaries of learning and teaching strategies, programme specifications and programme reviews).
- 177 We sought actual data for 2004/05 and 2005/06 and a forecast of costs for 2006/07 based on an assumption of no operational changes to either TQI or NSS compared with the requirements for 2005/06. The pro-forma distinguished between set-up and recurrent costs for each activity. It also distinguished between the costs of operational work undertaken by junior and more senior administrative staff (ie activities associated with 'doing the job'), and those associated with central strategic oversight by senior officers of the institution (which we called 'steerage'). A copy of the costing pro-forma used, incorporating guidance issued to the HEIs to ensure that data were reported in a consistent manner by each institution, is included at Annex 7.
- 178 We also held a number of discussions with JM Consulting about the most appropriate approach to uprating the direct costs returned by institutions to an approximation of the full economic costs. There is no provision within the Transparent Approach to Costing (TRAC) for uprating the direct costs of central activities, since under TRAC all the central costs are allocated through the use of cost drivers to academic income-earning departments and to

⁴⁹ See footnote 17.

income-earning activities. In the light of these considerations, and in consultation with Nigel Brown Associates⁵⁰, we decided simply to uprate the direct costs of TQI by a fixed percentage to take account of the contribution of TQI activity to central premises overheads. After examining the relative contribution of various elements to total central costs, we selected a figure of 25% as appropriate for this purpose⁵¹.

179 In 2004/05 there were 135 HEIs in England and Northern Ireland and we have therefore used a factor of 11.25:1 to gross up the cost data received to date from 12 institutions. (As the costs of implementing TQI and NSS are based on activities related to institutional structure and practice and are not linked to student numbers, we have uprated the cost data obtained from our survey according to the number of institutions in the sector and not to student numbers.)

Update on 2004/05 estimates

180 We have compared the out-turn spend for 2004/05 on implementing TQI/NSS cost data returned to us by the five institutions participating in the present study that were also involved in the previous JM Consulting study, and compared these with the early cost estimates produced by each institution for that study. With one exception, the costs reported now for TQI activity including NSS are higher than institutions were expecting at the time of the JM Consulting exercise.

181 The data in Table 2.1 below give an average institutional cost in 2004/05 for all TQI activity, including NSS, of £30,500 for set-up costs and £18,400 for recurrent costs. These figures compare with early estimates of the average annual cost per institution of TQI excluding the NSS of £24,000 set-up and £24,000 recurrent costs calculated by the earlier study. Following further analysis of the report data and discussions with JM Consulting about their work on this aspect of the QAF, we have revised their calculations to give an average annual cost per institution for TQI **including NSS** of £28,000 for set-up and £28,000 for recurrent annual expenditure. The estimates produced by JM Consulting have lower underlying direct costs and a much higher mark-up percentage for associated indirect costs.

182 We found that, by 2005/06, although the average set-up cost per institution had fallen to only £9,900, the average recurrent cost had increased to £52,100 per institution. This is primarily because the recorded costs for NSS have almost doubled between 2004/05 and 2005/06.

183 By the third year of implementation (2006/07), institutions expect set-up costs to have fallen virtually to nothing, but they expect that recurrent expenditure will by then be around

⁵⁰ Nigel Brown Associates recently completed national reviews of UK chemistry and physics provision for the relevant learned societies involving activity costing analogous to that we have undertaken for this present study.

⁵¹ Our analysis of the activities resulting in the direct cost data institutions reported to us suggested that premises charges were the only substantive overhead element appropriate to this study. The majority of institutions did not disaggregate central institutional charges, and any levy for premises costs within the institutions we visited was not based on full economic costs. Moreover, by capturing senior management costs directly attributable to TQI and NSS steerage activities, we have identified part of the largest element in the overhead charge and it would not have been appropriate to add these costs into the overhead calculation a second time.

£54,000 per institution. (This figure is estimated on the basis that no major changes will be made to the information requirements.)

- 184 Table 2.1 below sets out the total costs split between start-up and recurrent for TQI and NSS activities for 2004/05 (actuals), 2005/06 (estimated out-turn for 31 July calculated as at 1 June 2006) and 2006/07 estimates (based on the assumption that the requirements for TQI and NSS would be the same in 2006/07 as in 2005/06).

TABLE 2.1 Total sector costs of TQI and NSS (England & Northern Ireland)

	SECTOR COST (£000s)		
	Yr 1 (2004/05)	Yr 2 (2005/06)	Yr 3 (2006/07 estimated)
Set-up	4,122	1,340	45
Recurrent	2,479	7,033	7,330
TOTAL COST	6,601	8,373	7,376*

Source: Institutional pro-formae grossed up for indirect costs and to the whole sector

* Discrepancy due to rounding

- 185 We found considerable variation of practice in the introduction and implementation of TQI and NSS between the 13 institutions included in our study⁵², and we would expect this diversity to be representative of the range of practice across the sector as a whole. The range of total direct costs incurred in 2004/05 for TQI including NSS was between £5,000 and £153,000. In 2005/06 there was a similar range of direct costs, between £4,500 and £148,000. By 2006/07 the range of expected costs was from £2,000 to £143,500. Those at the upper end of these ranges tended to be pre-1992 universities.

Overall costs for the sector

- 186 Table 2.2 below shows the breakdown of the overall figures summarised in Table 2.1 according to the three main components of TQI and NSS. These are: the quantitative data requirement derived from the HESA Student Record and DLHE statistics (headed 'HESA' in Table 2.2); quantitative data collected through the National Student Survey (headed 'NSS'); and the qualitative information.

⁵² See examples cited in paragraph 148.

TABLE 2.2 Total sector costs for TQI and NSS by activity type (England & Northern Ireland)

	ACTIVITY COSTS (£000s)						TOTAL
	Yr 1 (2004/05)		Yr 2 (2005/06)		Yr 3 (2006/07 estimated)		
	Set-up	Recurrent	Set-up	Recurrent	Set-up	Recurrent	
HESA	942	476	368	682	13	708	3,189
NSS	792	527	266	2,226	13	2,376	6,200
Qualitative data	2,387	1,476	706	4,125	20	4,246	12,961*
TOTAL	4,122*	2,479	1,340	7,033	46	7,330	22,350

Source: Institutional pro-formae grossed up for indirect costs and to the whole sector

* Discrepancies due to rounding

- 187 One striking aspect of these data is the very significant rise in NSS costs between 2004/05 and 2005/06, from £1.4 million to nearly £2.5 million. The costs of maintaining the qualitative data rose much more modestly, and the costs of maintaining the quantitative data from HESA actually fell over the same period. This increase probably reflects the reaction by institutions to the publicity given to the results from the first year of NSS and the league tables reporting student satisfaction.
- 188 Another key finding concerns the relative costs of the three major activity types. From Table 2.2 it is clear that activity associated with the qualitative aspects of TQI (headed 'Qualitative data' in the table) is by far the most costly activity for institutions. This is true of both set-up and recurrent costs in each year of the period we have investigated. In terms of total costs over the three years, the costs to institutions of activities associated with qualitative aspects of TQI represent 58% of their actual and of their predicted costs; whereas the costs of both quantitative activities together are only 42% of institutions' total costs over the same period. Although we did not ask institutions to distinguish between the direct costs attributable to the various component parts of the qualitative data, one institution estimated that some 90% of all its qualitative data costs were in 2004/05 for the external examiner elements; this profile is expected to continue in subsequent years.

Cost categories

- 189 Most of the costs identified by institutions were staffing costs. Table 2.3 below shows the breakdown of total costs between staffing costs, other direct costs (mainly travel and subsistence costs together with consumables) and the central charge (assumed to be mainly premises and therefore non-staffing costs⁵³).

⁵³ Based on a factor of 25% of the total direct costs.

190 Table 2.3 shows that staffing costs represented around 96% of direct costs and 77% of total costs including the central charge in 2004/05. It also demonstrates that these percentages increased – or are forecast to increase – across the three year period⁵⁴.

191 Additionally, it is likely that the split between staff costs and other costs does not fully reflect total staff costs over the longer-term, since we have made no provision for costs that will arise to cater for staff turnover. For example, the significant proportion of staff costs associated with work undertaken by clerical and junior administrative staff is likely to result in a relatively high level of staff turnover. Discussions with institutions suggested that junior staff posts might turn over on average every three years. Associated with staff turnover will be a requirement for staff training to enable new staff to undertake the various aspects of their job that will relate to TQI/NSS activities. Additionally, for at least some institutions, there will also be one-off (set-up) costs for the recruitment of replacement staff, such as external advertising charges. One institution was able to give us information about the costs of recruiting a junior administrator to work full-time on TQI/NSS in 2005/06. Advertising costs and staff time for short-listing and interviewing candidates for this post together totalled just under £5,000.

TABLE 2.3 Total sector costs for TQI and NSS by cost type (England & Northern Ireland)

	COSTS		
	Yr 1 (2004/05)	Yr 2 (2005/06)	Yr 3 (2006/07 estimated)
Staffing costs (£000s)	5,072	6,488	5,773
% of Total direct costs	96.0%	96.9%	97.8%
% of Total costs	76.8%	77.5%	78.3%
Non-staff direct costs (£000s)	209	210	128
% of Total direct costs	4.0%	3.1%	2.2%
% of Total costs	3.2%	2.5%	1.7%
Total direct costs (£000s)	5,281	6,698	5,901
Indirect costs (£000s)	1,320	1,675	1,475
Total non-staff costs (£000s)	1,529	1,885	1,603
% of Total costs	23.2%	22.5%	21.7%
TOTAL COSTS (£000s)	6,601	8,373	7,376

Source: Institutional pro-formae grossed up for indirect costs and to the whole sector

192 As noted above, we asked institutions to identify clerical/junior administrative staff and senior administrative staff costs spent on all aspects of the workload associated with activities to develop and implement TQI/NSS; and to distinguish between these staff costs and the costs of central policy/senior management time (which we called steerage). Steerage costs include time spent considering the introduction and impact of TQI and NSS at senior committees, such as the Academic Board. We issued guidance on the precise calculation of staff costs and used the standard TRAC definition of 1650 hours per

⁵⁴ Note that we have included a relatively modest year-on-year uplift for staff costs, set at 5% per annum, to take account not only of inflation but also to recognise that staff costs will rise during the three year period through implementation of the new pay framework. Although not all institutions are implementing this at the same time (and thus the actual % increase may be different in each year for each institution), we asked institutions to assume the same % increase each year to smooth implementation costs across the three year period and to ensure we do not include any cost increases not specifically related to TQI.

year in calculating all staff costs, to ensure that all data were returned on a consistent basis across the HEIs.

- 193 Table 2.4 below shows the split of staffing costs between central strategy costs and operational costs for each of the three years considered in this report.

TABLE 2.4 Distribution of staffing costs for TQI and NSS (England & Northern Ireland)

	STAFFING COSTS ⁵⁵ (£000s)		
	Year 1 (2004/05 actuals)	Year 2 (2005/06 estimated out-turn)	Year 3 (2006/07 estimated)
Central strategy costs	1,682	2,108	1,597
Operational costs	3,390	4,380	4,176
TOTAL STAFF COSTS	5,072	6,488	5,773

Source: Institutional pro-formae grossed up for indirect costs and to the whole sector

- 194 Table 2.4 shows a slight fall in the proportion of staffing costs attributed to the central strategic oversight across the three year period, from about one-third in 2004/05 to 28% for 2005/06. This is consistent with what might be expected following the introduction of a major new requirement of this kind for the sector, especially where there are perceived reputational risks.
- 195 At the same time institutions reported increasing operational staff costs, which rise by 29% between 2004/05 and 2005/06 and by 23% between 2004/05 and 2006/07.

Opportunity costs

- 196 The identification of opportunity costs, mainly in the form of staff time needed for activities such as training, documentation and system development, proved especially difficult for the TQI pilot study and for the JM Consulting study of the costs and benefits of the QAF.
- 197 The recruitment and initial training for clerical/junior administrative staff is one area where there might be expected to be additional opportunity staff costs. As noted above, a regular turnover of post-holders from these grades might be expected⁵⁶. However, we were unable to obtain firm data about actual staff turnover rates so early in the introductory phase of TQI implementation (our study took place during Year 2 of implementation).
- 198 Although we were unable to obtain hard data about opportunity costs across the sector as a whole, we received some information from a sub-set of institutions that participated in the study.
- 199 For example, one HEI provided us with a list of quality assurance activities that had to be postponed because of TQI/NSS requirements in the first two years of implementation. These included a wide range of quality enhancement measures, such as: finalising guidance on peer observation of teaching; reviewing the effectiveness of programme

⁵⁵ Excludes 25% uplift for central premises cost allocation.

⁵⁶ See paragraph 191 above.

review processes; detailed mapping of institutional quality assurance processes against the QAA Code; full implementation of the placement review; and the full integration of postgraduate research students and their examination processes into the institution's own quality assurance and enhancement system.

CONTINUING DEVELOPMENTS

- 200 Most respondents at all levels accepted that TQI was likely to be around for the foreseeable future and wanted to see changes that would improve its efficacy for target users, and also for it to be more user friendly for those that had to manage and administer it within institutions. From the outset we were aware of the broad timetable being pursued by HERO, which included remedial work, following the launch in September 2005, to be followed by a period of refinement and then further development over the following two years, and that those changes had been the subject of consultation with the sector. During the course of the study we learnt of plans by the TQI Funders Group to approve a short-term programme to consolidate development of TQI pending the outcomes of the review of the QAF and decisions over the appointment of the main contractor for TQI.
- 201 At the seminars in London and Liverpool a presentation was made by HEFCE describing, in outline, the programme that had been approved for implementation immediately, and thereby affecting the 2006 TQI exercise, and of likely developments for the subsequent year subject to the outcomes of the QAF review expected during the autumn of 2006. Those plans are to be published alongside the QAFRG's conclusions and recommendations in autumn 2006.

ANNEX 1

MEMBERSHIP OF THE QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK REVIEW GROUP

Members

Chair	Dame Sandra Burslem Ex Vice Chancellor, Manchester Metropolitan University
HEFCE Quality Assessment Learning and Teaching Committee members	Professor Phil Jones Deputy Vice Chancellor and Sub Warden, University of Durham Helen Higson Deputy Head of Academic Programmes and Director of Undergraduate Studies, Aston Business School, Aston University
UUK members	Professor Robert Burgess Vice Chancellor, University of Leicester Professor David VandeLinde (<i>to 9 May 2006</i>) Vice Chancellor, University of Warwick
TQI/NSS Steering Group representative	Professor Michael Arthur Vice Chancellor, University of Leeds Chair, TQI/NSS Steering Group
SCOP members	Professor Philip Robinson Principal, University of Chichester Professor David Vaughan Principal, Cumbria Institute of the Arts
NUS member	Sofija Opacic Higher Education Policy and Research Analyst
Professional and Statutory Body representative	Cara Talbot Quality Assurance Programme Manager, General Medical Council
Employer representative	Carl Gilleard Chief Executive Association of Graduate Recruiters
Co-opted	Professor Roger Brown Vice Chancellor, Southampton Solent University

Ex Officio

HEFCE
Liz Beaty
Director, Learning and Teaching

Sean Mackney
Head of Learning and Teaching

Department of Employment
and Learning, Northern
Ireland
Celia Chambers

Observers

QAA
Peter Williams
Chief Executive Officer

DfES
Jane Tory

Higher Education Funding
Council for Wales
Celia Hunt

EFCW
Scottish Funding Council
Lesley Sutherland

HERO
Chris Harris (*to 9 May 2006*)
Chief Executive Officer

Higher Education Academy
Professor Paul Ramsden (*from 17 July 2006*)
Chief Executive

Secretariat

HEFCE
Graeme Rosenberg, Senior Policy Officer

Emma Creasey, Policy Officer

UUK
Caroline Carpenter (*to May 2006*)
Fiona Hoban, Policy Adviser (*from May 2006*)

SCOP
Helen Bowles, Policy Adviser

ANNEX 2

CONSULTATIONS

The project team are extremely grateful to the following people who provided an input to this study. In total 160 people were interviewed, mostly on an individual or group face to face basis during the period February to June 2006. Only a very small number of interviews were conducted over the telephone.

In addition, 103 delegates attended the two open seminars held during May in London and Liverpool, and a further small number of people made an input by correspondence. Some of these had also been involved as respondents in the fieldwork but around 80 were new and making an input for the first time. We have not listed below the additional groups of contributors at the seminars, nor those that wrote to us or helped us with verifying data, but we estimate the total number of people contributing to this study to be around 250.

Professor Edward Acton	Pro Vice Chancellor, University of East Anglia
Louise Allen	Senior Officer, Academic Quality and Standards, Leeds Metropolitan University
Janet Alleyne	Head, Quality Management and Audit Unit, University of Ulster
Andy Allison	Academic and Student Administration, University of Birmingham
Vicky Annand	Head of Communications and Publicity, Goldsmiths College
Richard Angell	President, Guild of Students, University of Birmingham
Joanna Ashman	Learning and Teaching Quality Office, University of East Anglia
Dan Austin	Assistant Management Information Officer, College of St Mark and St John
Stephen Bailey	Records and Information Officer, JISC
Jagori Banerjee	Teaching Quality Co-ordinator, Faculty of Medicine, University of Liverpool
Tony Barnhill	Head, Student Recruitment, University of Ulster
Rob Bell	Management Accountant, University of East Anglia
Colin Beresford	Student Data Assistant, University of Brighton

Angela Bibby	Database Information Analyst, Registry, Goldsmiths College
Professor Alan Bilsborough	Pro Vice Chancellor, University of Durham
Yvonne Binning	Academic Quality Unit, University of Birmingham
Richard Blackburn	Head of Life Sciences, University of Greenwich
Gareth Bodrell	Curriculum Maintenance Officer, Registry, Goldsmiths College
Richard Bolley	English and Comparative Literature Departmental Administrator, Goldsmiths College
Angela Bolton	Full Economic Costing Manager, University of Liverpool
Helen Bowles	Policy Adviser, Standing Conference of Principals
Danielle Bramley	Student Records Section, University of Cambridge
Andrew Brett	Head of Learning and Teaching Office, Goldsmiths College
David Brookfield	Head of Student Administration, University of Liverpool
Claire Brown	Director, UK Student Recruitment Office, University of Liverpool
David Brown	Management Accountant, College of St Mark and St John
Melanie Burdett	Director, JM Consulting Limited
Marcus Cannon	School of Geography, Earth and Environmental Science, University of Birmingham
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Susanne Colwyn	Marketing Information Officer, Leeds Metropolitan University
Kat Corbett	Student Representative, Cumbria Institute of the Arts
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Christine Couper	Head of Planning and Statistics, University of Greenwich

Leanne Craiton	Students' Union, Leeds Metropolitan University
James Dixon	Education Officer, Students' Union, De Montfort University
Kate Dodd	Director of Student Life, University of Birmingham
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Nicki Doyle	Schools Liaison Office, University of Durham
Judy Evans	Senior Assistant Registrar (Management Information), University of Brighton
Professor Kelvin Everest	Pro Vice Chancellor, University of Liverpool
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Ben Ferguson	Vice President (Education) Guild of Students, University of Birmingham
Andrew Fisher	Head of Department of Planning, Goldsmiths College
Peter Fisher	Manager, Central Recruitment, University of Greenwich
Louise Gale	Quality Officer (External Examiners/Awarding Bodies), De Montfort University
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Sharon Hamill	Strategic Planning Service, De Montfort University
Sarah Hannaford	Cambridge Admissions Office, University of Cambridge

Chris Harris	Executive Director, HERO Ltd
Nick Harris	Director of Development and Enhancement, QAA
Richard Harvey	Associate Dean for Science Admissions, University of East Anglia
Heather Hewitt	Senior Accountant, University of Ulster
Professor Alex Hughes	Pro Vice Chancellor, University of Birmingham
Fiona Hoban	Policy Adviser, Universities UK
Becky Hume	Vice President, Students' Union, University of Brighton
James Hutchinson	Membership Services Manager, Students' Union, Goldsmiths College
Bill Howe	Student Advice and Development Manager, Leeds Metropolitan University
Brian Houlgrave	Academic Registrar, College of St Mark and St John
Karen Irving	Finance Manager, Cumbria Institute of the Arts
Virginia Isaac	Director, Marketing and Communications, UCAS
Stephen Jackson	Director of Reviews, QAA
Jill Johnson	Director of Outreach, UCAS
Kathy Johnson	Academic Sub Dean, Faculty of Science, University of Liverpool
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Drew Livingston	Students' Union Academic Affairs Officer, University of Cambridge
Anne Logue	Student Data Coordinator, University of Brighton
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Tony Mann	Head of Mathematical Science, University of Greenwich
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Irfan Zaman

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ANNEX 3

SEMINARS HELD IN LONDON AND LIVERPOOL MAY 2006

Upon completion of the fieldwork interviews in the HEIs we held two seminars – one in London, the other in Liverpool on 23 and 26 May respectively, to which we invited representatives of all HEIs in the UK, partners and stakeholders.

An 'Emerging Themes' paper was prepared and sent to delegates in advance of those seminars to provide feedback and to encourage further inputs.

The following three questions were posed for delegates attending the seminars.

- 1. *Have we missed anything? Is there anything you would like to add?***
- 2. *Is there anything we have reported that does not seem right / needs moderating?***
- 3. *What key messages do you detect?***

ANNEX 4

BACK-END FUNCTIONALITY ISSUES

We invited the Back-End Users Group (BUG) to provide a note of problems that their members, and others they represent, have had or continue to have with the management of TQI.

The following is a summary of issues raised.

- The links from the TQI site to institutional pages are problematic: different HEIs wish to manage this in different ways and the TQI list, coming from UCAS, cannot pick up postgraduate or 'part-time only' undergraduate provision. It also fails to pick up programmes which are still being taught but are no longer recruiting for the future, although institutions may wish to continue to publish the programme specifications until the final cohort has graduated, and other TQI data will continue to be shown during this period (and, for DLHE data, even after it!). We would prefer that the TQI site linked to a 'front-page' for programme specifications for each HEI, leaving each HEI to manage its material from there in the most appropriate way for its provision and structures. We believe that this is in line with the feedback given by HEIs to the QAA's consultation on *Programme Plus*. In any case, attempts to make detailed links to *programme* specification websites will be problematic until the TQI site deals in programmes rather than higher-level JACS codes. It would require a co-ordinated effort to address this issue: the QAA has an interest in the publication of programme specifications, UCAS has an obvious part to play, and HEIs need to be actively involved, as does HERO.
- There have been problems with uploading templates as a result of very minor errors (such as one character in the wrong place). We would like the software to be as tolerant as possible of this sort of thing. There is also anecdotal evidence that the templates do not work from Macs.
- We would like further discussion of the format of the spreadsheets provided by HEFCE for checking the HESA data to make them as user-friendly as possible.
- Problems have arisen with the dissemination site because the reports do not seem to have a printer-friendly option allowing graphs and keys to be printed in colour and scaled. There is also a need to be allowed to choose fewer than four profiles. It seems that the cross-tabs may help with this, but in that case the guidance from Ipsos MORI directing users to them needs to be clearer.
- It would increase the accuracy of the data if reports were produced showing percentages rather than a rounded number of respondents. A percentage would also be more intuitive. We understand that the current pattern follows HESA rules that percentages are derived only from numbers of 55 or more (or 52.5 plus rounded up) and we would like this to be reviewed by HEFCE.
- Some HEIs have set up their external examiners' reports so that there will be several summaries for any one programme. When the headers roll over, only one copy is

rolled forward. Either this needs to be changed or there needs to be a quick facility to duplicate the headers.

- The need to ‘ask permission’ to change something on the header, even a spelling mistake, is not well-received. It suggests an inquisitorial approach to HEIs’ use of the site which is unhelpful. We understand that this is a QAA requirement for the audit trail but it conveys an unfortunate impression.

In addition to the above, the secretariat of BUG provided the following summary of issues arising during their meetings for the period April 2005 to March 2006, with notes of action taken – all from relevant minutes.

Issues raised in previous meetings	Action taken to date
7 April 2005	
A revised hierarchy of subjects to be used on the TQI site following Funding Council consultation was explained to the group. It was felt that the new structure was an improvement in general although there was concern that subjects which may represent significant numbers for an individual HEI, but not across the sector, would be hidden. The ‘invisibility’ of Welsh Studies and location of Classics were commented upon.	The site provides explanation where possible and messages clarify what is being shown when moving to broader subject levels.
That the outcome of discussions on the course search and links to programme specifications be clearly communicated to HEI contacts.	Addressed.
HEIs will often need to provide a follow-up response to any issues raised by external examiners, and in internal reviews, after initial publication of the reports. They may also wish to re-publish reports simply because errors are not noticed until the report is viewed on the live site. A request to re-publish a report generates text, which asks for the reason for re-publication. It was felt that this text is currently too threatening given that there are many legitimate reasons for re-publishing reports.	A more appropriate ‘response’ text is now given when reports are submitted for re-publication.
The difficulty of identifying external examiners’ reports that relate to collaborative provision was raised. It was suggested that this could be indicated in the report title, which can be up to 255 characters, but it was thought that this was not clearly understood and that some HEIs were working to a much smaller character limit.	This was clarified to HEI contacts (TQI Update April 2005)
The site shows a negative response on external examiner report standard questions if a ‘yes’ has not been entered on the template. Some users felt that an n/a response would be relevant in some cases, eg where a practitioner external examiner cannot comment on comparability with standards in other HEIs.	This remains a problem, as there is an expectation of ‘completeness’ by the project sponsors, ie that the three questions must be addressed by the given external examining structure of the institution.
There was discussion of ways to improve communication with, and between, HEI contacts. They can find it difficult to keep	HERO participated in a series of regional seminars for TQI contacts in autumn 2005, organised by

<p>abreast of TQI developments given the evolving nature of the project, its complexity and political sensitivity. Some feel isolated, or unsupported, within their own institution.</p>	<p>Ipsos MORI, and has delivered presentations to groups such as the Council of Validating Universities, SCOP, and the Academic Registrar's Council quality group's data collectors from Welsh HEIs.</p> <p>Guidance documentation is placed on the TQI practitioner site. Plans to move TQI contacts to a newly designed 'Arena' site, which would store relevant information and enable discussion groups, have been put on hold pending the outcome of the TQI tendering exercise.</p>
<p>7 June 2005</p>	
<p>There was further discussion of the difficulty for practitioner external examiners in confirming comparability of standards with other institutions, according to the TQI summary report template. It was re-iterated that institutions must have an external examining structure in place which provides such assurance; the report template can summarise the responses of more than one external examiner involved in the same area of provision or refer to another report in which the question is addressed, however the default answer is 'no' which makes cross-referencing to other reports problematic.</p>	<p>It was agreed that group members should submit details of the problems and possible solutions on this issue, to inform discussion at the TQI Stakeholders Group (none were received).</p>
<p>Concern was expressed through BUG that those in further study, who were also working, were included in graduate/non graduate job analyses in TQI destination data.</p>	<p>Raised at the TQI Technical Group on 23 June 2005, resulting in the partial exclusion of this category from destination data shown on the site.</p>
<p>28 September 2005</p>	
<p>It was felt to be unsatisfactory that non involvement of TDA and NHS funded students in the 2005 National Student Survey would confuse users of the data for related subject areas. Users might assume, for example, that data for education studies also reflected data for initial teacher training programmes. This was a particular concern for those institutions with high proportions of non-surveyed students. It was reported that these students would also not be included in the 2006 survey, and this was felt to be regrettable.</p>	<p>This issue was raised with HEFCE; TDA students (excluding PGCE) have been included in the 2006 survey, but not those who are NHS funded.</p>
<p>It was noted that the TQI site carried explanatory messages when related subjects were selected, but there were still concerns that the default messages explaining 'missing' data did not sufficiently clarify the distinction between an HEI which did not have provision in the area, one which did but whose students had not been surveyed, and one which did but whose responses had not reached the publication thresholds.</p>	<p>HERO has made considerable effort to provide data messages which clearly convey the data constraints on the site and meet the requirements of the project stakeholders. However the site has been criticised both for its complexity to the user, and for the underlying inconsistencies in the data sets (which are beyond the remit of HERO).</p>
<p>Some problems relating to the roll forward of 2004 external examiner report headers were reported, but generally it was felt that this had been a satisfactory and time saving exercise.</p>	<p>Addressed.</p>
<p>It was requested that the 'drop down' year selection for external examiner summary reports on the live site should default to the year which would yield most reports, currently 2004.</p>	<p>Addressed.</p>

<p>Some typographical errors and inconsistency in the external examiner report template were reported.</p>	<p>Addressed.</p>
<p>BUG considered possible improvements to the site 'back end' and the following priorities were determined:</p> <p><u>High priority</u></p> <p>Faster functionality. Return to original reports selection rather than current default return to 'all reports'. Batch approval facility.</p> <p><u>Medium priority</u></p> <p>Extension of 'editor' functions to include editing of headers and uploading Word documents. Search facility (alphabetical, department, external examiner name, date report lodged, approver). Facility to print/export selected reports, eg list of external examiner reports.</p> <p><u>Low priority</u></p> <p>Easier access to external examiner reports. Facility to duplicate external examiner header information. Monitoring site usage for each HEI.</p>	<p>A new server has been purchased for the HERO CMS, which should significantly improve the speed at which the back end of the TQI site operates. The switch has been more complex than anticipated but the migration is being carried out in the week commencing 5 June 2006.</p> <p>The problem whereby the TQI approver is taken to the 'all reports' list, after approving a report, has been addressed. The user is now returned to the tab/filter which they started from, so will be returned back to the 'ready to approve' list after approving a report.</p> <p>'Batch approval facility' was not supported for development funding because of quality implications for the normal edit/approve checking process. There could be a danger that approval could be viewed as a 'rubber stamping' process, when care is required, not only over report content, but to ensure that all correct fields associated with the report have been selected on the site. Because TQI approval status can be assigned to meet the individual requirements of the HEI, there is flexibility to distribute this workload as appropriate.</p> <p>Extension of 'editor' functions to include editing of headers was also not supported for funding; it was considered that this task should be carried out by a TQI approver. Again, the flexibility over appointment of approvers/editors can help in terms of distribution of workload.</p> <p>Funding has been secured to amend the process for re-publishing a report and report header print/export facility, although there is now uncertainty over implementation as upload of external examiner reports for the current assessment period has been suspended pending the current tendering exercise to secure a new TQI contract.</p> <p>Given finite resources from the funding bodies, there are no plans to fund or carry out the 'low priority' improvements.</p>
<p>An issue was raised relating to the publication of edited or amended reports. It was noted that such reports must be set as 'ready to re-publish'; neither version of the report will be displayed on the live site if the amended report is set at 'work in progress' .</p>	<p>Funding has been agreed to carry out necessary development work, but there is uncertainty for the reason described above.</p>
<p>There was discussion of a problem relating to 'virus' alerts received in respect of some templates, when attempting to upload.</p>	<p>This relates to an Epic 'warning' message; more suitable wording is now used. The message is given when the template has been so altered that functionality is likely to be impaired.</p>

Some HEIs are unable to upload report templates automatically (and resort to copy and paste of sections).	Some problems encountered in uploading completed report templates arise because of accidental deletion of hidden bookmarks. HEIs were advised not to make changes to the template to avoid the possibility of losing essential coding needed for automatic upload. Many HEIs automatically upload the standard template successfully.
HERO was asked to look at improvements to link UCAS/HERO and TQI sites.	This has been carried out.
13 December 2005	
External examiner and internal review reports are currently automatically published at monthly intervals, or immediately upon request. It was suggested that a more frequent automatic publication interval would be useful. The procedure for re-publishing reports was felt to be overly cumbersome; given that there is an audit trail of all changes, it was felt that the procedure could be simplified. It was felt that delays in updating reports could be costly to the reputation of the HEI at critical times of the year, such as the busiest part of the UCAS application cycle.	The QAA has now relaxed the requirement that external examiner and internal review reports are only published at monthly intervals. The current situation is that these reports will be published automatically at the end of the month, but can also be published earlier 'on request'.
The new text editor was reported to be working well.	
It was queried why 'Report selection' year options go back to 1999.	It was noted that this had been requested by the TQI funders because some HEI contacts wished to upload previous internal review reports to the site.
7 March 2006	
There was further discussion of the intention to aggregate data over two years, which will increase publication possibilities for data relating to small student cohorts. The view that this is an inappropriate and invalid use of the data was re-iterated. It was suggested that an indicator of the differences between the two data sets should be provided, in addition to the overall average but it was also reported that Open University research has shown that the use of statistical 'confidence intervals' is not well understood by site users.	This concern was raised with HEFCE. HERO has been required to implement data aggregation to the site for the 2006 site release, as this is a policy decision of the funding bodies.
It was reported that 2004 external examiner report headers, which have been archived, have incorrectly re-appeared as live report headers when headers were automatically carried forward to create the 2005 record. This cannot be corrected for QAA spreadsheet reports, which will be based on information taken from the website at the end of February 2006.	HEIs have been asked to identify any occurrences of this and the affected headers have been re-archived by HERO, so that they will not appear in the next 'snapshot' report provided to the QAA (based on site content at the end of May 2006).

In addition the following written comments were received.

- I have found that when doing a search, by department/school/faculty in the back end of the HERO site for a particular report header, the report header comes back not found. I have then

created a new report header as I have mistakenly thought that the report header is not contained within the system. However, when I later search by undergraduate/postgraduate and by status of report eg 'not started' and then scroll through, page by page (which is a very time consuming way of searching for a report header), I then find the report header that I had searched for earlier. This has created a lot of additional work, is frustrating and has led to me having to archive many report headers which have been created unnecessarily.

- When report headers have been rolled forward from one year to another, only one report header has been rolled forward. In all cases I am submitting several reports for the same report header. I therefore have to create new report headers for each programme where there are several reports for the same programme and this is time consuming.
- Occasionally, when browsing to a report, the system will not upload a particular report for some reason and I therefore have to cut and paste the report from the original external examiner's submission. This again can be time consuming and happens on a regular basis.
- Occasionally, the appearance of a report can alter, when it goes live, to how it was originally uploaded. For example, I uploaded an undergraduate report for the School of (name supplied). The report was an entirely complimentary report about the School. However, when the report appeared on the live site, question marks appeared before the start of each paragraph on the second page of the template. This distracted from the content of the report, which had made entirely positive remarks about the programme. Although the HERO staff did edit the report after I raised this with them, it was up on the live site for a few weeks and the School of (name supplied) contacted me to raise their concerns about the way the report had been published on the live site.

Specific problems with NSS

- Annex B, Agreement regarding use of additional data from the National Student Survey. As the university had concerns and therefore was not prepared to sign the form in the light of Freedom of Information Act issues, we were not able to access the data when it was released to other institutions.

ANNEX 5

TQI SUBJECT HEADINGS (41)

- Agriculture and Related Subjects
- Architecture, Building and Planning
- Art and Design
- Biology and Related Sciences
- Business
- Civil, Chemical and other Engineering
- Combined
- Communications and Information Studies
- Computer Science
- Economics
- Education Studies
- Electronic and Electrical Engineering
- English-based Studies
- European Languages and Area Studies
- Finance and Accounting
- History and Archaeology
- Human and Social Geography
- Law
- Management
- Mathematical Sciences
- Mechanically-based Engineering
- Media Studies
- Medical Science and Pharmacy
- Medicine and Dentistry
- Nursing
- Other Creative Arts
- Other Languages and Area Studies
- Other Subjects Allied to Medicine
- Performing Arts
- Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies
- Physical Geography and Environmental Science
- Physical Science
- Politics
- Psychology
- Social Work
- Sociology, Social Policy and Anthropology
- Sports Science
- Teacher Training
- Technology
- Tourism, Transport, Travel and others in Business and Administrative Studies
- Veterinary Science

ANNEX 6

ACRONYMS

BUG	Back End Users Group
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DLHE	Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (survey)
EU	European Union
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HE	Higher education
HEI	Higher education institution
HERO	Higher Education and Research Opportunities in the UK (the current contractor for the development and hosting of the TQI website)
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
JACS	Joint Academic Coding System
JISC	Joint Information Systems Committee (of the UK further and higher education Funding Councils)
NHS	National Health Service
NHS	National Health Service
NSS	National Student Survey
NUS	National Union of Students
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency for higher education
QAF	Quality Assurance Framework
QAFRG	Quality Assurance Framework Review Group
SCOP	Standing Conference of Principals
TDA	Training and Development Agency for schools
TQI	Teaching Quality Information
TRAC	Transparent Approach to Costing
UUK	Universities UK
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service

ANNEX 7

COSTING DATA PRO-FORMA

IMPACT OF TQI ON INSTITUTIONS DATA COLLECTION TEMPLATES

Please read the Guidance Notes before completing these Templates.

YEAR 1 2004/05 Actual Costs in UK£	Operational Staffing costs				Central strategy Staffing costs (<i>"Steerage"</i>)		Travel & Subsistence		Other non-staff costs (e.g. equipment & consumables)	
	Secretarial/ Junior Admin		Senior Admin							
<i>Please give totals for each activity</i>	Set- up	Recurrent	Set- up	Recurrent	Set- up	Recurrent	Set- up	Recurrent	Set- up	Recurrent
HESA TQI data (<i>derived from student record & DLHE</i>)										
NSS activities										
QA TQI requirements										

YEAR 2 2005/06 Estimated Year-End Out-turn in UK£	Operational Staffing costs				Central strategy Staffing costs (<i>"Steerage"</i>)		Travel & Subsistence		Other non-staff costs (e.g. equipment & consumables)	
	Clerical/ Junior Admin		Senior Admin		Set- up	Recurrent	Set- up	Recurrent	Set- up	Recurrent
	Set- up	Recurrent	Set- up	Recurrent						
HESA TQI data <i>(derived from student record and DLHE)</i>										
NSS activities										
QA TQI requirements										

YEAR 3 2006/07 Estimated difference from Year 2 Out-turn as % change	Operational Staffing costs				Central strategy Staffing costs (<i>"Steerage"</i>)		Travel & Subsistence		Other non-staff costs (e.g. equipment & consumables)	
	Clerical/ Junior Admin		Senior Admin		Set- up	Recurrent	Set- up	Recurrent	Set- up	Recurrent
	Set- up	Recurrent	Set- up	Recurrent						
HESA TQI data (<i>derived from student record & DLHE</i>)										
NSS activities										
QA TQI requirements										

GUIDANCE NOTES FOR COMPLETING COSTINGS TEMPLATES

These templates are designed to include costs directly incurred by each specified activity according to three main headings: staffing, travel and subsistence, and other non-staff costs (including equipment/consumables costs). Note that the data requested in these templates will form part of the overhead for teaching costs under the TRAC methodology. Please do not build in any element for overhead costs; we will apply a standard central overhead charge to your costing data.

Please refer to the **definitions** below, to identify what activities should be included in the total figure given for each of the three categories of TQI/NSS activities that are listed in the headings on the left hand axis.

Please use these **definitions** also to identify how the types of cost defined in the column headings on the right hand axis should be calculated.

For all cost categories, please distinguish between set-up and recurrent costs for undertaking the specified activity in the correct column. Note that set-up costs may continue for more than one year and may start in Year 2 or Year 3.

For Year 1, please enter actual costs incurred in 2004/05 based upon the calculation principles included in the cost definitions set out below. If your institution incurred preliminary set-up costs prior to Year 1 of TQI and you are able to calculate what these costs were (e.g. staff time and travel and subsistence expenses for attending sector meetings), please add these as a footnote in your response. Please do NOT include any costs incurred prior to Year 1 (i.e. before 2004/05) as part of the total set-up costs for Year 1.

For Year 2, please consider actual expenditure incurred on the activity as of 1 June 2006 and enter your year-end out-turn estimate for 2005/06, according to the calculation principles included in the cost definitions.

For Year 3, please estimate how you anticipate TQI activity will change relative to your predicted 2005/06 out-turn expenditure and indicate on the form what % increase or decrease against 2005/06 expenditure you anticipate, assuming that all TQI and NSS requirements are the same as for 2005/06. (For instance, if you anticipate that your set-up costs for activities associated with HESA data in 2006/07 will be only half as great as in 2005/06, enter "-50%" and if you anticipate

that recurrent costs for this activity will be the same as for 2005/06 enter "No change" in the appropriate column.)

COST DEFINITIONS

ACTIVITIES

HESA TQI DATA Include here the TOTAL figure for each category of expenditure relevant to all activities associated with the development and checking of data derived from HESA for presentation on the TQI website. This includes data derived from the institution's HESA returns for both the Student Record and the First Destination statistics (Destination of Leavers from Higher Education, DLHE). Relevant activities would include: data checking and validation of the HESA data as presented on the TQI website; producing the institutional profile and commentary on the HESA data; any iterations you may have had with HERO about these data (e.g. if you made a case for the suppression of any data for your institution in Year 1); and any changes/developmental activities your institution may have undertaken on your own website/intranet as a result of the quantitative data from HESA as presented on the TQI website.

NSS ACTIVITIES should include the TOTAL figure for each category of expenditure relevant to all activities associated with the National Student Survey. This would include any preparation your institution made in advance of the survey (e.g. discussion of the nature and purpose of the survey at Academic Board, any promotional events/materials the institution supported directly or funded via the Students Union); data checking (e.g. confirming the list of final year students produced from your HESA records); iterations with the Students Union and/or IPSOS about how non-respondents would be followed up by Ipsos; any activities the institution took to improve response rates from students; analysis of the results of the NSS for your institution; and any use of the NSS data made by the institution. Report here only the *institution's* activities in support of NSS: activities by Students Unions will be reported separately.

QA TQI REQUIREMENTS Include here all aspects of activity associated with preparing and uploading onto the website the specific qualitative information requirements of TQI. These include: the External Examiner reporting requirements; the summary of your institution's Learning and Teaching Strategy; Programme Specifications; and Periodic Review reports. Each of these may have a number of specific activities that you need to include in calculating your activity totals. For example, to meet the External Examiner (EE) reporting requirement, there will be obtaining the EE reports and getting them into the correct format; entering the Yes/No data; producing

and entering the EE comments; and the institution's procedures for reviewing any EE reports that selected the No box.

COST CATEGORIES

STAFFING COSTS are likely to be your highest cost activity. They will fall into two distinct categories:

OPERATIONAL STAFFING COSTS which will cover all aspects of the workload associated with activities to develop and implement TQI/NSS. They should be allocated across two main categories for those on the institution's staffing establishment who were involved in TQI/NSS activities. Using the average (mean) total cost (i.e. salary plus on-costs) of the relevant salary bands actually used by your institution for (a) clerical/junior administrative staff and separately (b) for more senior administrative/academic related staff at the rates paid in 2004/05 for Year 1. For Year 2, uplift the 2004/05 average costs by 5% to calculate the estimated salary costs for 2005/06. In estimating the percentage difference in out-turn staffing figure for Year 3 (2006/07) compared with 2005/06, don't forget to include a further 5% increase over 2005/06 staffing costs for 2006/07.

(The figure of 5% is to take account not only of inflation but also to recognise that staff costs will rise during this three year period through implementation of the new pay framework. We appreciate that not all institutions are implementing at the same time and that the % increase may be different for each institution. We are therefore asking all institutions to assume the same % increase for each year. This will smooth implementation costs across the three year period we are reviewing and ensure we do not include any cost increases not specifically related to TQI.)

Include here all costs associated with work/actions that form part of the activity described, (e.g. include here staff time for attendance at external national/regional training events). If temporary staff members were employed or new establishment posts were created specifically to deal with TQI/NSS, please include their costs here. Please use the standard TRAC definition of 1650 hours/year in calculating all staff costs.

Do NOT include here senior management time for policy/overview, or time in central university/college committees devoted to discussion of TQI/NSS: these should be included in Central Strategy or "Steering" Staffing Costs (see below).

Please include only university/college staff members in this calculation. We are aware that Students Union sabbatical officers were involved with the NSS survey in several institutions. However, SU members/officers are not staff members, so we will be reporting on their involvement separately in our report.

CENTRAL STRATEGY (“STEERAGE”) STAFFING COSTS should include all senior staff time spent in high level strategic policy/overview activities by PVCs, Deans and members of the Senior Executive. Please calculate the costs of this staffing element using the average (mean) total cost (salary plus on-costs) for each grade of senior staff involved in strategic policy overview activities (e.g. Pro—Vice Chancellors and other members of the Senior Executive). Include here too the time of administrators spent on strategic briefings for the Senior Executive (*but include their work on implementing the TQI/NSS within the Operational Staffing Costs above.*) Please use the standard TRAC definition of 1650 hours/year in calculating all staff costs.

Include here staff time spent in discussion of TQI/NSS by committees (e.g. Academic Board, Teaching and Learning Committee, Academic Planning Committee, Board of Governors). For calculating the time spent by central committees in considering TQI/NSS policy and implementation, please classify committee membership by staff grade/level (e.g. PVCs, Members of the Senior Executive, Deans, Heads of Department, Senior Lecturers, Senior Administrators) and use the average total cost for that grade per hour according to the number of committee members from each grade multiplied by the total number of hours devoted to TQI/NSS over the course of the relevant academic year for each relevant committee. (Note that most institutions involved in the sample typically found very large numbers of central committee meetings devoted to TQI/NSS as part of their start-up activities for Year 1 but that the number of central committee meetings involved on a recurrent basis in overseeing TQI/NSS by Year 2 was significantly lower.)

TRAVEL AND SUBSISTENCE COSTS should cover attendance at external national/regional meetings or training events (such as those organised by HEFCE or HERO), consultation meetings with the sector or attendance at sector groups associated with aspects of TQI and/or NSS (e.g. the Backend User Group). It might also include travel costs associated with internal TQI/NSS meetings on one site if your institution operates from more than one site, or if you provide training events about TQI/NSS that include staff from associate colleges or partner institutions. Please do NOT try to calculate your exact spend on travel and subsistence for these activities. Please use a standard per diem cost of £100 per person per day towards both travel and subsistence expenses if you are from an institution located outside London and the meeting was located in London or if the meeting was located outside London but not in your own region. If you are an institution located within London and the meeting was also in London please use a standard cost of £20 per person per day for travel and subsistence expenses. For external meetings held within your own region, or for internal meetings involving significant inter-site travel, please also use the standard charge of £20 per person per day for travel and subsistence expenses.

OTHER NON-STAFF COSTS Please include here the actual costs for 2004/05 (or estimated year-end out-turn costs for 2005/06) for all other forms of non-staff expenditure incurred in introducing and running TQI/NSS. These might include, for example: the purchase or lease of any equipment (such as a new IT server); any external specialist professional services employed to develop TQI/NSS in your institution (such as legal costs or professional copy writers); and any other consumables purchased specially for introducing or running TQI/NSS activities.