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Printable summary of your responses

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Your responses

1

Do you agree that the principles in paragraph 31 are broadly the correct ones on which the revised quality assurance system should be based?

Strongly agree

1a

Please add any comments:

This response is on behalf of the Engineering Council, the Royal Academy of Engineering and the professional engineering institutions, some of whom may submit their own individual responses. These engineering bodies broadly support the principles in paragraph 31. We welcome the inclusion of references to a wide range of stakeholders, including students, and the need for information that is accessible to a public audience, although it must be recognised that within public there are groups that will have differing information needs.

The Engineering Council sets the overall requirements for the accreditation of engineering and technology degrees, and licenses professional engineering institutions to undertake accreditation within these requirements. The accreditation system is based on learning outcomes and is strengthened by these having been adopted by the QAA as the subject benchmark statements for engineering. Engineering Council accreditation complements the quality assurance process though it differs from quality assurance in that accreditation looks at degree programmes rather than institutions. There is no requirement for an engineering degree to be accredited by the Engineering Council, though an accredited degree has enhanced value.

There is indeed scope for ensuring that the different elements are seen as a comprehensive whole (para 29,g), for example by the greater sharing of information prepared for quality assurance purposes with engineering accreditation panels, and vice versa. We do not believe that the university's staff responsible for quality are typically, if at all, involved in the process of engineering degree accreditation. This is a missed opportunity for both the engineering department and the university's QA staff to improve both the efficiency and the effectiveness of the process. We would support activity directed towards assisting universities in making a stronger link between professional accreditation and quality assurance. Consideration should be given to placing greater emphasis on this comprehensive whole in paragraph 31, with the aim of further aligning the requirements and function of professional accreditation and quality assurance.

Point a: We would welcome action that promotes a more rigorous approach to publishing information about the professional accreditation status of engineering degrees; this could also contribute towards removing the perception that HE is insular in its approach to quality assurance (para 29, f). Greater public acknowledgment by universities of the role of PSRBs in assuring standards could also contribute to the aspiration in point e, independent judgement.

Point c: In 'meeting the needs of institutions', a revised QA system should continue to allow for universities to offer a diverse range of provision, in line with their individual mission, vision etc. This diversity is, we believe, a strength of the UK HE system. For example, in engineering, accreditation standards are set as a threshold and beyond these, departments are able to develop a variety of diverse provision.

Employers are not mentioned as a stakeholder group. With the increase in employer co-funded provision, consideration should be given to the mechanisms for future assurance of quality that meets the needs of employers. This may require the addition of employers in this point.

Point e: This is desirable, though it is not clear from whom this is independent. The increase in co-provision and innovative methods of delivery may make it increasingly difficult to achieve this.

Point f: Engineering accreditation activity aims to support a culture of quality improvement, and we welcome the inclusion of this point.

2

Do you agree that the objectives set out in paragraph 32 are the correct ones for the revised quality assurance system to meet?

Agree

2a

Please add any comments:

The Engineering Council has undertaken an informal self-referencing exercise against the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance. This revealed a high degree of conformity and was a useful exercise.

a.ii: This would benefit from clarification about the focus of expectation as the current phrasing may refer to the public's expectation of the system (we assume this) or the results.

b.iii We welcome the inclusion of however they are delivered as this will help to establish work-based provision as an accepted mode of delivery. Sometimes this can be viewed as less rigorous than more established modes. However, the QA system will need to be kept under review to ensure its relevance to innovative provision.

b.iv QAA may like to consider probing further the extent to which universities seek PSRB accreditation in disciplines where this is available, and where accreditation is lacking, seek an explanation.

f: The Engineering Council's system of accreditation also seeks to achieve improvement.

We feel that academic self-evaluation is an important part of a quality assurance system.

Some, for example employers, may be surprised that self-improvement is not given greater emphasis than promote (point iv).

3

Do you agree that the broad characteristics set out in paragraph 38 are the right ones to consider when revising the institutional audit method?

Agree

3a

Please add any comments:

Consideration might be given to the more explicit inclusion of reliability .

a.i: We would welcome the inclusion of information about the accredited status of engineering degrees in published lists such as Unistats data.

b: It may be necessary to have different versions of published information tailored for specific audiences. For a public non-specialist audience, consideration should be given to emphasising the basis for a decision and reducing the more technical detail. This can be helpful in situations where the information is necessarily of a confidential nature (eg staffing issues).

4

Do you agree that institutional audit should be more flexible, focusing both on key areas common to all institutions, plus additional topics to be determined as necessary?

Agree

4a

Please add any comments:

We welcome the attention given to students requirements for information, and we imagine this will also be of use to their advisers. Clear explanations of the categories of information and how the data may be interpreted will be required.

Further explanation would be useful about the basis on which topics are designated as key , those that may vary and the circumstances where variation might take place.

Para 40: In disciplines such as engineering, 'staff training and development' could include experience of the industry and professional updating. The review of staff training and development would need to include employers if they are responsible for the delivery of workbased programmes (for example via a learning contract type of arrangement), recognising that their requirements might differ from those of campus-based academics.

5

Do you agree that the QAA should be asked to consider how comparability of standards might be better addressed in institutional audit and the Academic Infrastructure?

Agree

5a

Please add any comments:

We agree with the premise stated in paragraph 44 and the need to ensure public confidence in the awards gained by students. Both institutional audit and the academic infrastructure could play a part in this. QAA should explore whether any refinements to the latter may also be required to complement the revised QA system.

In engineering accreditation, we are concerned with the achievement of threshold standards rather than the class of degree. Achievement of these standards results in accreditation, though it is recognised that universities go beyond these threshold standards in a variety of ways.

There is an option to confer accreditation for a shorter period than the typical five years, pending the university addressing specific concerns. QAA may wish to consider including this type of arrangement in the revised QA system.

6

Do you agree that the QAA should be asked to review the terms it uses to describe the different levels of confidence expressed in audit judgements?

Strongly agree

6a

Please add any comments:

We support any work to enhance the understanding of QAA's judgements by non-specialists.

We agree that the term 'limited confidence' is ambiguous, and without supporting explanations there is a risk that it may be mis-interpreted, probably as being more negative than is intended.

7

Subject to sector agreement on the data that the institution makes available to inform prospective students and other interested parties about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards:

Do you agree that institutional audit should make a judgement about the reliance that can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of this information?

Strongly agree

7a

Please add any comments:

No further comment.

8

Do you agree that the QAA should provide summaries of institutional audit reports for a non-specialist audience?

Strongly agree

8a

Please add any comments:

We feel that there is scope for universities to say more about their internal processes to the outside world. When providing summaries for non-specialist audiences, contextual and explanatory information will be required. The summary should be accurate and consistent with the full report, and un-necessary over-simplification avoided.

9

Do you agree that institutional audits should be organised on a rolling basis rather than in a fixed cycle?

Strongly agree

9a

Please add any comments. In particular, if you agree, what would be your definition of a minor change to procedure, compared to a more substantive revision?

This may also provide the opportunity to embrace a developmental approach to quality assurance, which may help with the further embedding of quality enhancement.

More substantive revision: a change to a university's regulations on compensation and/or condonement.

10

This document has set out a number of ways in which we might improve the quality assurance system, to make it more accountable, rigorous, transparent, flexible, responsive and public-facing. Is there more that we might do? If so, please give details

The engineering profession is committed to supporting the achievement of a revised system of QA that meets the needs of all stakeholders. The Engineering Council would be pleased to work with QAA to maximise the potential of links between the processes of engineering accreditation and QA for the benefit of all stakeholders.

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