

Education Committee
27 November 2012
Proposed Changes to Quality Assurance Handbook

Classification	Public
Purpose	For discussion
Issue	Following the successful completion of two GOsC reviews using the new Quality Assurance Handbook, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education is proposing two changes to the Quality Assurance Handbook to assist in the administration of the process.
Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">A. There should be no change in the Protocol for unsolicited information, based on consideration of feedback from the Osteopathic Educational Institutions (OEIs).B. The Review Handbook should be amended to allow all Visitors to participate in the observation of learning and teaching.
Financial and resourcing implications	None.
Equality and diversity implications	None.
Communications implications	Communication of the updates to the Review Method Handbook if agreed.
Annex	None
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Background

1. The GOsC introduced a new Review Method Handbook from 1 September 2012 which was developed in conjunction with the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). This can be accessed through the following link: http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/Handbook_course_providers.pdf.
2. In advance of the official launch, two institutions agreed to undertake reviews at the beginning of 2012 using the new review method and this has allowed the administrative processes to be tested. The QAA has reviewed how well the process worked and has approached the GOsC with two suggestions for amending the Handbook which it is seeking approval for from the Education Committee.
3. These proposals were presented to the GOsC meeting with the Osteopathic Educational Institutions (OEIs) on 14 November 2012 to gain feedback to inform the decision of the Education Committee. This feedback is outlined below.

Proposals from the QAA in relation to the Handbooks

4. Following the two reviews conducted under the new GOsC review process, the QAA has discussed the feedback from the review Visitors on how well the process worked in practice. As a result of the feedback it is seeking the following two amendments to the process as outlined in the Review Method Handbook:

a. Unsolicited information

The QAA proposes a change to the Protocol for unsolicited information: <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/GOsC-protocol-unsolicited-information.pdf>. The protocol currently states that unsolicited information can be received up until the start of the review. Feedback from the Visitors indicates that this impacted negatively on the operation of the visit and, in one case, delayed the production of the outcome report, as the team had to wait for the provider to respond in writing to three complaints received during the review period. The QAA therefore suggests the introduction of a deadline of two weeks before the start of the visit for the submission on unsolicited information.

b. Observation of teaching and learning

- i. The QAA proposes to amend page 20 of the Handbook in relation to observation of teaching and learning. The relevant statement on page 20 is as follows:

'Visitors normally undertake the observation alone in order to minimise disruption. Only visitors with current experience in teaching on osteopathic courses with RQ status will be used to observe teaching and clinics.'

ii. The review Visitors, particularly the co-ordinators found this to be extremely limiting and it has been suggested that it would be appropriate for all specialists to observe non-clinical teaching and those with current or recent experience of teaching on a course with Recognised Qualification status should be able to observe clinical teaching. This was the position under the previous method, which the QAA felt worked well.

Discussion

Unsolicited information

5. The QAA proposal to only include unsolicited information relevant to the visit to be submitted two weeks ahead of the visit was explained as follows to the OEIs:
 - a. Advantages of a two week cut-off date
 - i. There would be a clear cut-off date that would allow the Review team adequate time to review the feedback rather than it being unplanned.
 - ii. The cut-off date would also allow some specific time for the institution to respond.
 - iii. The cut-off date would not impact and potentially detract from the review in terms of diverting time away from other agreed activities as the investigation would have been planned in, in advance. It would also mean that OEI staff time not diverted from other requirements of the review.
 - b. Disadvantages
 - i. May discourage feedback from individuals which could be important.
 - ii. Feedback received after the cut-off date will still need to be dealt with either by the QAA or the GOsC – it is preferable to deal within the review.
6. Alternative option – to suggest in advertising that it is preferable to receive feedback two weeks in advance of the Review to allow time for Visitors to adequately consider. This could include a date. This would help mitigate last minute responses without rejecting them. Any feedback received which does not allow time for a response or meeting during the Visit could be dealt with after in writing, if not already explored during the Review. The GOsC would need to be sufficiently flexible to accommodate longer timescales for production of reports should the team have to consider a lot of feedback presented at last minute.
7. Feedback from the OEIs was that they would prefer that no deadline is imposed, even an indicative one, as this would restrict the submission of feedback. They were supportive of an open, transparent process operating at all times and to receiving feedback.
8. We therefore recommend no change to the unsolicited feedback protocol.

Observation of teaching and learning

9. We discussed the suggestion to widen the Visitors who could observe teaching and learning with the OEIs as outlined below.

10. At its meeting of June 2011, the Education Committee agreed specifically not to limit the composition of the team as seen in the following extracts of the minutes from that meeting:
 - a. 'There was only one comment made against this question: that Annex C of the Handbook for course providers should be amended to clarify that at least two members of a visiting team would have current experience in teaching on osteopathic programmes with RQ status and wide experience of academic management and quality assurance at institutional level in UK higher education.'

 - b. 'The proposed Handbooks specify that collectively visiting teams will be able to demonstrate the two qualities outlined in paragraph 19. Specifying that two of the team would have these qualities would give less flexibility in the composition of teams, perhaps militating against the recruitment of visitors from a wider pool of people, such as students and recent graduates.'

 - c. 'The specification for a Visiting Team rather than the competencies expected of each individual increases the flexibility of constructing a team in order to address specific concerns that may arise at different institutions. Overall the team must meet the specifications outlined in Annex C. It is suggested that insistence on characteristics of individual team members would be a step backwards.'

 - d. 'The concern that a team might not be qualified to assess the OEI is mitigated by the teams being agreed with the OEI and the Education Committee. In future, extra assurance could be given by the QAA clearly outlining why a specific team has been constituted. That no change is required to Annex C of the Handbook, but that QAA is clear in its communications to the OEIs and GOSc that the Visiting teams have the necessary experience between them in relation to the review that is taking place.'

11. The Committee agreed, however, that only those with current experience of teaching and learning in an RQ institution would be able to observe teaching. The advantages and disadvantages of this are indicated below
 - a. Advantages
 - i. That only those with knowledge of current recognised osteopathy courses could provide comments, so therefore knowledge would be up to date.
 - ii. Improves consistency between OEIs.

- b. Disadvantages
 - i. Does not allow for external education perspectives on current educational practice in osteopathy and thus a potentially more critical eye.
 - ii. Restricts the use of visit team members and places responsibility for comments on all teaching and learning on one or two team members with no ability to cross-reference.
12. Alternative option - To allow all Visitors to observe teaching and learning but require that any comments in the report must be on basis of observations made by at least one Visitor currently involved in Higher Education. For the clinical aspect this must involve at least one Visitor involved in current clinical learning on a Recognised Qualification osteopathy course.
13. At the meeting on 14 November 2012, we sought Feedback from the OEIs. They indicated no difficulties in all review Visitors observing teaching and learning and welcomed the opportunity of an external perspective. However, one OEI indicated that there may be some sense in employing the osteopath visitors to observe the clinical teaching and learning to make the most of their specialist knowledge.
14. It is proposed that a mechanism whereby such details were agreed with the OEI as part of the Visit could deal with these matters in a satisfactory way – but such a restriction should not be imposed by the method set out in the Handbook itself.
15. In light of the discussions, we see this recommended change as an operational change making no material difference to the principles outlined in the Handbook. In relation to the unsolicited protocol issue – as we have proposed no change, we are making no restrictions on the submission of information. Therefore we submit that there is no need to consult on either of these proposals more widely before the Education Committee makes its decision.

Recommendations:

- A. There should be no change in the Protocol for unsolicited information, based on consideration of feedback from the Osteopathic Educational Institutions (OEIs).
- B. The Review Handbook should be amended to allow all Visitors to participate in the observation of learning and teaching.