



Progress report on HEFCE data audit recommendations

<p>Outcome requested</p>	<p>Audit and Risk Committee is asked to confirm that the action plan agreed with HEFCE following the audit of data that inform the 2013–14 quality-related research degree programme supervision fund allocation has been completed.</p>
<p>Executive Summary</p>	<p>[a] Between July 2013 and February 2015, HEFCE conducted a pilot audit of the data that informed the 2013–14 quality-related research degree programme supervision fund allocation. The audit resulted in three recommendations to improve data quality and a negative funding adjustment of c.£630k. HEFCE subsequently suspended the funding adjustment subject to Audit and Risk Committee providing assurance that QMUL ‘is on course to fully and satisfactorily implement the recommendations by the end of 2015–16 and the systems and processes at QMUL have been improved to ensure data informing supervision fund allocations is now robust’.</p> <p>[b] An action plan was agreed between QMUL and HEFCE to define what is expected. Audit and Risk Committee considered a progress report on 4 February 2016 and determined that the actions had been successfully implemented, but further monitoring of the data provided by schools and institutes would be undertaken over the coming months to ensure full compliance. The progress report was shared with HEFCE and no feedback has been received suggesting any concerns.</p> <p>[c] Audit and Risk Committee is asked to consider the following report so that the Chair can give appropriate written assurances to HEFCE by the end of June 2016.</p>
<p>QMUL Strategic Plan reference and sub strategies:</p>	<p>This paper relates to the following strategic objectives:</p> <p>[2.2] educate to PhD level an increasing number of students, derived from both the UK and overseas;</p> <p>[6.3] increase income from educational activities through an enhanced portfolio of courses, and more effective use of resources.</p>
<p>Strategic Risks:</p>	<p>The Strategic Risk Register notes the following risk areas:</p> <p>[11] sustainable income streams for activities;</p> <p>[13] maintain effective and constructive governance.</p>

Subject to prior and onward consideration by:	Considered by QMSE on 24 May 2016.
Confidential paper under FOIA/DPA:	No.
Equality Impact Assessment:	Not required.
Timing:	HEFCE has asked the Chair of Audit and Risk Committee to provide appropriate written assurances by the end of June 2016.
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Date:	20 May 2016
Senior Management/External Sponsor	Emma Bull, Interim Chief Operating Officer

Progress report on HEFCE data audit recommendations

1. This is the final report to Audit and Risk Committee on the implementation of the HEFCE data audit recommendations. Developments since the report considered by the Committee on 4 February 2016 are highlighted in yellow.

Recommendation 1: The College should enhance the data review procedures to ensure the reported student numbers and full-time equivalents (FTEs) are correct.

2. The actions agreed between QMUL and HEFCE in response to Recommendation 1 address issues with the governance and implementation of the student records system, and with the QMUL academic regulations.

[a] *Governance.* QMUL agreed to establish a new Student Administrative Systems Steering Group (SASSG) to oversee the maintenance and development of the student records system, with project boards focusing on specific areas, including postgraduate research (PGR) student records. The SASSG was established in October 2015 and meets monthly. The PGR project board secured approval for a series of developments in the student records system that improve the arrangements for capturing data highlighted in the action plan (transfers to writing-up status; records of academic progress in the second and third years of research; changes to thesis submission deadlines). The developments that are identified in the action plan have been delivered and the remainder of the project is on track to be completed by December 2016.

[b] *Implementation.* At the same time that the HEFCE audit was underway, QMUL reviewed its procedures for calculating FTEs for PGR students. An error was identified in the way the student records system had been implemented that was resulting in FTEs being reported incorrectly for a subset of PGR students. This error had been put right for data returned in 2012–13 and subsequent years, and HEFCE has accepted this.

[c] *Regulations.* Senate approved a change to the academic regulations in October 2015 to ensure that PGR students are transferred to the correct status for HEFCE reporting purposes as soon as they submit the final thesis. The change has been implemented for all current students.

Recommendation 2: The College should review the PGR student population returned to HESA for 2012–13 to identify all students for whom erroneous values of FUNDCODE, UOA2008, UOAPCNT, COURSEAIM, STULOAD AND ENDDATE have been reported and submit amendments to correct these errors. Consideration of the 2013–14 data is also required.

3. Our review of the student populations returned in 2012–13 and 2013–14 showed that previous action taken (described in paragraph 3[b] above) to correct the reporting of student FTEs had been effective. As a result, differences in the re-calculated student populations were minimal and within the tolerance levels that are normally accepted by HEFCE. The review also demonstrated that the other values identified by HEFCE had been returned correctly, with more robust data quality processes put in place. HEFCE therefore agreed that it was not necessary for QMUL to submit amendments to the data for 2012–13 or 2013–14.

Recommendation 3: Systems and processes should be amended to ensure errors similar to those identified in the audit testing do not recur in the future. In particular, the College should ensure there is a clear audit trail to the data

returned, student COURSEAIM and UOA2014 are correctly coded for students aiming for research degrees, and controls are in place to correctly report mode of study and STULOAD.

4. The actions agreed between QMUL and HEFCE in response to Recommendation 3 address issues with data assurance, student engagement monitoring and the timeliness with which updates to data are made.
 - [a] *Data assurance.* Additional data validation tasks have been embedded in the annual data audit schedule specifically to address the issues in the audit report. These improvements were applied to the 2014–15 HESA student data return. The project (described in paragraph 3[a] above) to develop the student records system is documenting in more detail how the HESA student data return is generated and members of staff in academic schools and institutes have engaged in briefings and meetings to improve their understanding of the implications of what they do for the quality of data returned to HESA.
 - [b] *Engagement monitoring.* An online supervision log was introduced in January 2015 and all PGR students and supervisors are required to maintain it. A system-generated warning has been introduced for students who have not logged a report in the previous 60 days, and reports on engagement data are being provided to academic schools and institutes. Agreement has been reached on more formal requirements for reviews of academic progress of PGR students in the second and third years of research, and the project (described in paragraph 3[a] above) to develop the student records system will enable the outcomes of these reviews to be centrally recorded. Together these developments provide a clearer audit trail between the data returned to HEFCE and evidence of individual student engagement in their research.
 - [c] *Timeliness of updates.* Aspects of the academic regulations have been simplified to reduce the number of updates that are required. ARCS is working to a ten-day service standard for updates to the student record.
5. The specific actions agreed between HEFCE and QMUL have been fully implemented. Additional, internal data validation tasks were implemented for the 2014–15 HESA student return and the data passed HESA's own validations. Audit and Risk Committee is therefore asked to **confirm** that QMUL is on course to fully and satisfactorily implement the recommendations by the end of 2015–16 and the systems and processes at QMUL have been improved to ensure data informing supervision fund allocations is now robust.

Jonathan Morgan
Academic Registrar and Council Secretary
20 May 2016