QAA

An Impact Study of the Guidance Documents for Higher Education Providers Published by QAA in 2013

Subscriber Research Series 2015-16

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In 2014-15, following a call for expressions of interest open to its subscribers, QAA commissioned six small-scale primary research projects intended to encourage collaboration between providers and promote the formation of communities of practice.

This report is **an impact study of the guidance documents for higher education providers published by QAA in 2013**. It was submitted to QAA by Dr Anesa Hosein from the University of Surrey and Dr Namrata Rao from Liverpool Hope University.

The reports are not QAA documents, so we have respected the authors' approach in terms of style and presentation. We hope that you will read them with interest.

Other topics in the series are the transition experiences of entrants to higher education from increasingly diverse prior educational experiences; and the role of student satisfaction data in quality assurance and enhancement.

For more information, and to read other reports in the series, visit:
www.qaa.ac.uk/improving-higher-education/research.

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Foreword

This study was commissioned to review the impact of the guidance[1] documents published by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) in 2013, as a result of a cross-sector consultation, initiated by the Higher Education Public Information Steering Group (HEPISG). The stimulus for the guidance was the funding changes introduced in September 2012, which increased undergraduate tuition fees to £9,000 per year, supported by student loans.

The suite of publications (covering class size, student workload, staff teaching qualifications, and responding to feedback from students) was intended to help providers ensure that transparent and helpful information is made available to current and prospective students about teaching methods and learning opportunities, to inform their choice of what and where to study. It was intended to be used to complement the Indicators and Expectations of the relevant chapters of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (particularly Part C) and relates to information about provision published on providers' websites and in their promotional material; as distinct from the Key Information Set (KIS) required by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) and the Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland (DELNI).

Public information is now of even greater significance since the publication of the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) guidance in March 2015, and the proposals of the BIS Green Paper in November 2015, *Fulfilling our Potential, Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice*, regarding the introduction of a Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF).

It is, therefore, timely to consider the progress made to date by higher education providers in ensuring that students have detailed and transparent information available to them about the learning experience on offer, before making decisions about their investment in education.

QAA would like to thank Ansa Hussein from the University of Surrey and Narmada Rao from Liverpool Hope University for their research, which has contributed to the evidence base of this report.

Ian Kimber
Director of Quality Development
QAA

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[1] Note: The guidance was compiled by a working group that included representatives of the following sector organisations, led by QAA: Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA); Higher Education Academy (HEA); GuildHE; Universities UK (UUK); Association of Colleges (AoC); National Union of Students (NUS).

Executive summary

The aim of this research was to investigate and assess the impact of the four guidance documents for higher education providers published by QAA in August 2013. The intention of the guidance (which was the product of extensive consultation with sector organisations) was to offer support to providers in making detailed and transparent information available to current and prospective students, particularly in relation to informing student choice.

The study examines how the online information differs, taking account of the following factors:

- discipline differences
- size of the institution
- students' perception of the programme quality (as denoted by Question 22 of the National Students' Survey (NSS).

The overarching research question, to be explored through the use of documentary surveys of 38 university websites and interviews with eight universities, was:

To what extent have various HEIs used the guidance documents to disseminate relevant information to prospective students?

The results revealed a variation in the extent of information present on class size, student workload and teaching qualifications, in relation to discipline differences, the size of the institution, and students' perception of the quality of the programmes.

While the QAA guidance documents have emphasised the importance of HEIs providing sufficient information for prospective students to enable them to make an informed choice regarding their higher education, the responsiveness of the universities surveyed in adopting the recommendations would appear to be variable and, at times, formulaic.

While the interview data suggests that the guidance did not have a significant impact on the provision of information by universities, the website survey data indicate that some of the recommendations of the QAA guidance have been implemented by many of the institutions.

Key findings

- The variation in information provided was found to be maximal with quality scores in the NSS, where institutions with high quality scores provided more information on their websites.
- The variation between disciplines was found to be largely insignificant, except in subject areas where the availability of specialist facilities and resources is an important component of the learning experience. For example, biological sciences, where the information presented was more extensive.
- The study indicates that, in general, the institutions surveyed appear to be doing well in providing information on the details of the 'facilitators of learning for the various types of delivery methods used' (lectures, seminars and laboratories, and so on).
- The study indicates that a consistently large amount of information on student workload is available, irrespective of the discipline, size of the institution, or the quality score in the NSS. However, expected contact time with tutors was an aspect of the student workload information that had limited presence on the websites. Institutions with high quality scores in the NSS presented significantly more information regarding contact time.

- The results indicate that only one fifth of the institutions surveyed provided some information on the class size for the various types of delivery methods (lectures, seminars and laboratories, and so on). However, the data suggests that a higher proportion of institutions with high quality scores in the NSS presented this information.
- The findings of the study indicate a lack of information on the teaching qualifications of staff at institutional level, and a limited presence of information at course level and in individual staff profiles.

Introduction

This research analyses the impact of the four QAA guidance documents whose intended outcome was to provide more transparent and helpful information on the learning and teaching (L&T) opportunities in higher education programmes to both current and prospective students. These QAA guidance documents were published in 2013 and are as follows:

- *Explaining Staff Teaching Qualifications: Guidance about Providing Information for Students*[2]
- *Explaining Class Size: Guidance about Providing Information for Students*[3]
- *Explaining Student Workload: Guidance about Providing Information for Students*[4]
- *Responding to Feedback from Students: Guidance about Providing Information for Students.*[5]

HEIs were expected to use these guides to discern the types of information (for example teaching and learning methods, support and contact time, learning opportunities and workload) desired by their students via their websites, prospectuses, definitive programme documents and/or open days and to use the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision as a guide on where this information should feature. The L&T information was also expected to be distinct from the KIS, which is a requirement of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) for prospective students. The KIS dataset is used to provide comparable standardised information on HEI websites that are drawn from the National Student Survey (NSS) (Davies et al, 2010). Hence, information provided by KIS may not necessarily cater for the diverse information needs of the students. KIS also provides limited information on aspects of L&T processes such as class size, pedagogical approaches used, student workload and so on, though these educational processes may be of particular interest to prospective students. Further, one of the drawbacks of KIS is that it is based on data provided by final year students reflecting on their experiences of the past three years rather than the current situation for those joining the first year of the degree. For these reasons, current institutional changes are best communicated through institutional websites and/or prospectuses rather than league tables, which would normally be based on past performance (Briggs, 2006).

The sources of information accessed by prospective students in their decision-making have been extensively researched (see, for example, Ball and Vincent, 1998; Hutchings, 2003; Slack et al, 2014; Pampaloni, 2010). Websites have been found to be one of the most influential sources of information for students in higher education decision-making (Pampaloni, 2010; Schimmel et al, 2010). For example, Slack et al (2014) found that 95 per cent of students access university websites and prospectuses. Therefore, this impact study focused primarily on the L&T information provided for prospective students on university websites.

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[2] Available at: www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication/?PubID=75.
[3] Available at: www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication/?PubID=74.
[4] Available at: www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication/?PubID=84.
[5] Available at: www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication/?PubID=201.

The study

Having recognised the importance of information on websites, it is important we consider how far the information needs of the students are being met over and above that provided by the KIS. Further, it is misleading to presume that the mere presence of the information in certain areas can ensure its consistency. We contend that there might be variation in the level of this information across various programmes within an institution. Further, we propose that the efficiency of dissemination of this information depends on the size of institution; that is, large institutions with a large number of programmes may find it more difficult to have a consistent dissemination strategy across the institution.

Considering that the QAA guidance documents are associated with enhancing student access to L&T information, it is probable that HEIs who are committed to their L&T are more likely to adopt this guidance. As suggested by Gibbs (2010), L&T information is of particular importance to the students in decision-making, hence it is probable that students from such institutions are more likely to have made well-informed choices and are more satisfied with the quality of their programme. Therefore, we argue that universities that demonstrate greater adoption of the QAA guidance are more likely to register higher quality scores.

The present study intends to identify whether students have access to sufficient L&T information via university websites which they can critically assess to make informed higher education choices. To enable assessment of the provision of L&T information on university websites, the adoption of QAA guidance documents has been taken as a measure. Possible patterns in L&T information variance with subject, institutional size and with perceived difference in the quality of L&T are explored to provide a deeper understanding of the variations in the dissemination of L&T information among HEIs with the view to help institutions to address any inconsistencies.

To this end the overarching research question was:

To what extent have various HEIs used the guidance documents to disseminate relevant information to prospective students?

The key sub-research questions were:

1. To what extent can prospective students find programme/course level L&T information recommended by the QAA guidance documents on the University websites?
2. How far is the L&T information consistent within the HEI across programmes?
   a. Does the L&T information vary between HEIs depending on their sizes?
   b. Does the L&T information vary between HEIs depending on the perceived quality of their programmes?
3. Is HEI-wide related information clearly signposted for the student, for example, institutional strategy for feedback and proportion of teaching qualified staff?
4. To what extent can the L&T information be attributed to the guidance documents?

Methodology

The study involved a documentary survey of university websites to include online prospectuses, HEIs' L&T strategy, and staff websites and programme pages. Four analytical frameworks were drawn (see Table 1) based on the criteria from the QAA guidance documents to determine the presence of the L&T information on class size, student workload, teaching qualifications and response to feedback.

Sampling frame

The size of the university was determined by the total enrolment at undergraduate level. The 2013-14 Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) statistics were based on the number of student enrolments for each of the 168 higher education providers. HEIs were then partitioned into small (≤9,500), medium (9,501-15,000) and large (>15,000) institutions depending on the number of enrolled students. The range of number of students was determined by using tertiles, that is to say the 168 institutions were partitioned into three equal parts of 1/3, 2/3 or 3/3 percentiles.

The quality of programmes in HEIs was approximated using Question 22 in the NSS, which measured students' perception of the overall quality of the programme. The 2014 NSS data for institutions were downloaded from HEFCE. The students' perception of the aggregated score of overall quality of programmes at the HEI was used. This dataset had 266 institutions and included further education colleges. Institutional names from the HESA statistics and the NSS data were matched for a total of 152 institutions. Institutions that had less than 1200 students were removed (16 in all); these were mainly specialised colleges such as for Arts, Music and Agriculture. The cut-off number was determined by the smallest university, the University of Buckingham, which had 1260 students. This left 136 HEIs (see Table 1). The HEIs were also partitioned into tertiles based on their overall quality scores into: high (>88 per cent), medium (>84 per cent to 88 per cent) and low (≤84 per cent). A chi-square test showed that there were no differences in the distribution (χ^2 (4) = 3.38, p =0.50). The chi-square statistical test was used, as it appeared that a large number of institutions were in the medium tertile for the NSS.

A stratified random sampling method was then used to select universities. Nine groups of universities were created depending on their size and overall quality (three sizes x three quality codings). Two degree programmes, Sociology and Biological Sciences, common to most HEIs and representative of Social Science/Humanities and Sciences and Engineering were selected to determine consistency of L&T information within the HEI. When shortlisting the programmes to be included in the sample, only undergraduate full-time courses that fell under the broad umbrella term of Sociology and Biological Sciences were included. Where Sociology and/or Biological Sciences were not available, allied subjects such as Natural Sciences and Human Sciences were considered. These subjects could constitute the whole degree or could form part of a degree in combination with another subject.

Each university in each of the nine groups was then assigned a randomised decimal number in Excel using the random number function. The universities in each group were then sorted based on their randomised number. At least four universities in each group with the lowest randomised number were initially selected for the study. HEIs that did not have both programmes were discarded and the next on the list was chosen. This yielded 36 universities. Two additional universities were also included in the list of universities, which were initially used for testing purposes (see Table 2).

Table 1: Total distribution of universities based on size and students' perception of the quality of programmes

Quality (as determined by NSS Q22)	Size			
	Large	Medium	Small	Total
High	10	16	13	**39**
Medium	18	12	20	**50**
Low	15	17	15	**47**
Total	**43**	**45**	**48**	**136**

Table 2: Sample distribution of the 38 universities

Quality (as determined by NSS Q22)	University Size		
	Large	Medium	Small
High	4	5	4
Medium	4	4	4
Low	4	4	5

Analytical framework

Using the four QAA documents, an analytical framework was developed to determine whether the information as advised in these guidance documents was present on the university websites. The criteria extracted from the QAA documents are presented in Table 3 along with explanations of what these criteria refer to.

Phase 1: Documentary survey

To determine the extent to which the criteria suggested in the QAA documents are provided for prospective students, a third year undergraduate student was employed to find the relevant information for the 38 HEIs included in the sample. The student was given 30 minutes for each programme to look for information on this list using the university webpages (including university prospectuses, staff webpages and general university webpages) and to indicate whether she was able to find information and the length of time she took to find the information.

Table 3: Document criteria used in the analytical framework

Document/criteria	Comment
Class size	
Class Size (for lectures, seminars, labs)	
Learning Experiences of Pedagogical Approach	In what ways are teaching and learning facilitated (for example interactive sessions, quizzes, group work etc.)
Responsibility of Student as Partner	Indication of the responsibility of the student in their learning
Facilitators of Class (lectures, seminar, labs)	Indication of who will take the classes (could be a named person or an indication of a person, for example a postgraduate student, an experienced lecturer)
Support of Learning	How learning is supported by availability of resources and/or within different types of class sizes
Staff teaching	
Proportion of Staff with Teaching Qualifications	Either be referred to FHEA, SFHEA; lecturers having a PGCert in Teaching and Learning; or PGCert in Academic Practice - this may be university-wide rather than at programme level
Staff Qualification at Programme Level	Qualifications of the staff (including MA, PhD, FHEA etc.) teaching on the programme/course on the programme page - this may be more general rather than specific, for example staff on this programme hold PhDs, MA and FHEA
Staff Qualification on Webpages	If staff qualifications are located on staff webpages (providing that they have indicated which staff will be teaching specific programmes)
Learning Experiences Provided by Range of Staff	Indication of the learning and teaching experiences provided by a range of staff (such as librarians, technicians, visiting lecturers, computer support staff) i.e. what do they provide to help the student learn?
Student workload	
Expected Academic Support: type and amount	Type and amount of support available to students (for example reading of drafts, one-to-one tutorials, online support including VLEs)
Persons providing academic support	Person who provides support (lecturers, tutors, specialist support staff, drop-in services)

Document/criteria	Comment
Methods of teaching, learning and assessment	The range of learning and teaching methods that the student is likely to encounter including lectures, seminars, supervision etc. and the range of assessments including project work, essays etc.
Expected amount of contact time	Amount of time student can expect to interact with the member of staff (could either be face-to-face or virtual)
Ways in which learning is supported by resources and specialist facilities	
The workload that students should anticipate	The amount of hours required for studying on the programme, additional information such as hours for assessments etc., lectures, independent study
Responding to feedback from students	This may be found at the programme or wider university level such as the L&T strategy, or a document on student feedback or evaluations.
Student feedback obtained at module level	
Mechanism for feedback/evaluation	
Students provided with appropriate time to response to evaluations	
Publish responses of module evaluations	
Student satisfaction data forms part of internal review process	
Indication on how student feedback enhances the learning experience	

Phase 2: Interviews

In Phase 1, the data only concerned whether a user was able to find the information. However, it was possible that the information was present but the research student was unable to find the information. For this reason, interviews were followed up on a selection of universities to triangulate the data and to act as a verification method. The interviews were also used to determine the extent that universities were aware of the QAA guidance. The interviews were intended to be with quality assurance/ enhancement personnel as they were considered to be those most likely to be aware of the quality documents and the procedures that occur in their university.

Quality assurance/enhancement personnel were contacted from 30 of the 38 universities. Eight universities were not contacted because in six of the universities a quality assurance/enhancement personnel contact could not be found and the remaining two were the pilot universities originally used. Of the 30 universities contacted, only eight accepted to do the interviews (see Table 4 for distribution). Of the remaining 22 universities, there was no response from nine, seven asked for more information but had no further contact, a further two declined without providing a reason, three declined because of upcoming reviews at their institutions and revamping their programmes based on the expected CMA regulations for higher education, and one withdrew after initially accepting because of concentration on CMA regulations.

Of the eight universities which accepted, four quality assurance/enhancement personnel were interviewed and the remaining four were from a variety of roles related to marketing, learning and teaching, student engagement and admissions.

Table 4: Distribution of interviews based on size and quality of the university

Size/ Quality	High	Medium	Low
Large	2	1	1
Medium		1	1
Small	1		1

Results

The results in this section are reported based on the phases of the data collection: that is, into the documentary survey of the websites and the interviews.

Phase 1: Documentary survey

The documentary survey of the 38 HEIs was completed using the analytical framework for evaluating the presence of information on the websites as advised by the QAA guidance documents. The data was analysed based on the degree programme, size and perception of quality of the programmes at the HEIs, which are now discussed.

Overview of L&T information provided on the university websites

The presence of information from all four QAA documents across the programmes, university size and quality coding is provided in Table 5.

In only about one-fifth of the HEIs, information on the class size parameters 'class size for various class types' (20 per cent) and 'responsibility of students as partners' (22 per cent),

was present on the website. However, the HEIs were more forthcoming in providing information regarding 'facilitator of class for the various class types' (79 per cent). Information on 'learning experience of pedagogical approach' (53 per cent) and 'support of learning' (51 per cent) was found in only about half of the HEIs.

At least two-thirds of the universities presented information on all parameters of student workload except the 'expected contact time', which was provided only on the websites of about one-third (36 per cent) of the surveyed universities. Information on 'methods of teaching, learning and assessment' was most commonly cited (91 per cent).

At least one-third of the HEIs presented information on all teaching qualification parameters. However, information on 'proportion of staff with recognised teaching qualifications at institutional level' in comparison to national level data was not included by any of the 38 surveyed HEIs.

Although 50 per cent of the HEIs indicated that they obtained feedback/evaluation from the student at the module level, only about 37 per cent of the HEIs appeared to have a programme or university-wide mechanism for obtaining this information with only 5 per cent indicating that they published the responses of the evaluations.

Table 5: Presence of information across the 76 programmes (two programmes x 38 universities) for the four QAA documents

Indicators	Programme		University size			Quality			Total
	Bio Sci	Soc.	Large	Med	Small	High	Med	Low	
Class size									
Class size for various class types	8	7	8	5	2[+]	9	4	2[*]	15 (20%)
Learning experience of pedagogical approach	19	21	14	12	14	19	12	9[*]	40 (53%)
Responsibility of students as partners	8	9	8	3	6	12	0	5[**]	17 (22%)
Facilitator of class for the various class types	34	26[*]	22	20	18	22	17	21	60 (79%)
Support of learning	18	21	9	19	11[*]	21	7	11[**]	39 (51%)
Student workload									
Type and amount of academic support available to students	28	29	20	22	15	19[*]	20	18	57 (75%)
People providing the support	24	24	16	19	13	16	16	16	48 (63%)

Indicators	Programme		University size			Quality			Total
	Bio Sci	Soc.	Large	Med	Small	High	Med	Low	
Methods of teaching, learning and assessment used	34	35	21	25	23	24	22	23	69 (91%)
Expected contact time	13	14	10	8	9	16	5	6[**]	27 (36%)
Resources and specialist facilities used to support learning	34	17	15[**]	18	18	22	14	15[+]	51 (67%)
Anticipated student workload	28	28	18	19	19	18	21	17	56 (74%)
Teaching qualifications									
Proportion of staff with recognised teaching qualifications at institutional level	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0 (0%)
Staff qualifications at programme/course level Qualifications of the teaching staff	16	17	7	13	13	11	16	6[**]	33 (43%)
Staff qualification on staff profiles on the university website	20	15	7	12	16[+]	12	16	7[*]	35 (46%)
Range of staff providing the learning experience	13	13	9	10	7	15	2	9[**]	26 (34%)
Responding to feedback from students									
Student feedback obtained at module level	19	19	15	13	10	12	14	12	38 (50%)
Mechanism for feedback/evaluation	13	15	9	12	7	9	10	9	28 (37%)

Indicators	Programme		University size			Quality			Total
	Bio Sci	Soc.	Large	Med	Small	High	Med	Low	
Students provided with appropriate time to respond to evaluations	7	7	2	8	4	4	2	8	14 (18%)
Publish responses of module evaluations	2	2	2	2	0	4	0	0[*]	4 (5%)
Student satisfaction data forms part of internal review process	15	16	11	10	10	8	10	13	31 (41%)
Indication on how student feedback enhances the learning experience	6	6	4	6	2	6	2	4	12 (16%)

Significance Level for Groupings in criteria: +: $p<0.1$; *: $p<0.05$; ** $p<0.001$

Consistency in L&T information across Biological Sciences and Sociology

When comparing the consistency of the level of information across the two programmes for the four categories of L&T information, two patterns of variations were apparent. Firstly, in Biological Sciences the information for the class size parameter 'facilitator of class for the various class types', was found to be higher than that in Sociology ($p=0.02$). While information for Biological Sciences was present on most HEI websites (90 per cent), only two-thirds of HEIs presented information (68 per cent) for Sociology. Secondly, we found statistically significant difference in information on the student workload parameter 'resources and specialist facilities' ($p<0.01$) between Biological Sciences (90 per cent) and Sociology (45 per cent). No significant differences were found in other parameters across the other four L&T information categories.

Consistency in the L&T information with size of HEIs

With regard to the variation in information based on size of the HEI, medium-sized universities tended to present more information in comparison to large and small-sized HEIs for the class size parameter 'support of learning' for 'class size for various class types' ($p=0.02$). Similarly, significant variations were found in the level of information on student workload parameter 'type and amount of academic support available to students' where information in large (83 per cent) and medium-sized (85 per cent) universities on amount and type of academic support was much higher in comparison to small-sized (58 per cent) universities ($p=0.04$). However, information on other parameters of the analytical frameworks for class size and student workload did not show significant variation with size of the universities. Correspondingly, there was no significant difference found between HEIs of various sizes with respect to the information provided for staff teaching qualifications. There appears to be a marginally significant difference for the staff qualifications on webpages, where large universities tended to provide less staff qualifications.

Consistency in L&T information between HEIs depending on perceived quality of programmes

Variation in information on class size parameters with variation in quality scores of the HEIs was compared. Universities with high quality scores generally presented the highest amount of information. Although the level of information present in all HEIs was not high in general, significant variation was found in 'class size for various class types' with change in the levels of quality scores (p=0.05). Even though the information was present for only a third of the universities with high quality scores (35 per cent), it was around five times the information presented by universities with low quality scores (8 per cent) and twice that of the information presented by universities with medium quality scores (17 per cent). Significant differences were found in the information present in 'the learning experiences of various pedagogical approaches' (p=0.02) across the HEIs. Universities with high quality scores presented significantly higher information (73 per cent) in comparison to those with medium (50 per cent) and low (35 per cent) quality scores. Information on 'responsibility of students as partners' was also found to show significant variation where universities with high quality scores were more likely to emphasise this. While HEIs with high quality scores presented this information in about half the cases (46 per cent), this was absent in all HEIs with medium quality scores and was present only in a fifth (19 per cent) of HEIs with low quality scores (p<0.01). No significant difference was found in the levels of information on 'facilitator of class for various class types' for the HEIs with different levels of quality scores. A significant difference was found in 'support of learning' provided to the students by the HEIs (p<0.01). The majority of the HEIs (81 per cent) with high quality scores presented this information on their websites. Surprisingly, HEIs with low quality scores presented more information (42 per cent) in contrast to HEIs with medium quality scores (29 per cent).

Evaluation of the variation in information on student workload in HEIs with different quality scores revealed that the amount of information on 'expected contact time' presented by HEIs with a high quality score was significantly higher (62 per cent) in comparison to HEIs with medium (21 per cent) and low (23 per cent) quality scores (p<0.01). No significant differences were found in other student workload parameters.

Significant differences were found in HEIs with various levels of quality scores in all parameters of teaching qualifications except for information on proportion of 'staff with recognised teaching qualifications at institutional level' in comparison to national level data, which was not presented on the websites of any of the 38 HEIs.

Two-thirds of the universities with medium quality scores provided information on 'staff teaching qualification at programme level' (p<0.01) and on the 'staff qualifications on staff profiles on the university websites' (p=0.02) (67 per cent each) followed by approximately half of the universities with high quality scores (42-46 per cent). Information on 'staff teaching qualification at programme level' and on the 'staff qualifications on staff profiles on the university websites' was present in only about a quarter of the HEIs with low quality scores (23 per cent and 27 per cent respectively).

HEIs with high quality scores provided most amount of information on 'range of staff providing the learning experience' (p<0.01, 58 per cent) in comparison to universities with medium (8 per cent) and low quality scores (35 per cent).

Finally, with regard to the last QAA document *Responding to Feedback from Students: Guidance about Providing Information for Students*, there was low presence of this information but was similar across programmes, size of university and quality scores except for information on publishing responses of module evaluations, which only four universities provided, all from high quality score universities.

Phase 2: Interviews

The extent that L&T information can be attributed to the guidance documents

The interviews were revealing on the extent that personnel were aware of the four QAA documents. Half of the universities were not aware that the four QAA documents existed. Three of these institutions were surprised that they had not come across the documents previously. However, two of them indicated they were relatively new to their roles, starting within the last 18 months. Considering that the documents were recently published (in the last two years), the lack of awareness of these documents among the quality assurance personnel, suggests the limited dissemination of these documents within the institutions. The remaining two participants suggested that the reason for it was that it did not come through their normal QAA dissemination routes as they were not quality assurance/enhancement personnel. Of these four institutions, three of the institutions indicated had they known about the documents they were likely to have used them to inform their decisions. However, one institution indicated that they found the documents unhelpful as they were not structured in a format they could circulate to their departments and articulate explicitly what information to include on their websites.

Of the other four participants who had heard of the documents, one indicated they did not look at the documents closely, one indicated they found only one document, the 'response to feedback' when they were searching about how to handle evaluations in their university and the final two disseminated through their usual channels of university boards with only one university ensuring that the information was incorporated into their dissemination of information for their prospective students.

HEI-wide related information clearly signposted to the prospective student

The interview data indicated that although in several cases our student researcher did not find the data present, the interviewees indicated that the data was there, particularly on dealing with responses to feedback and staff data. However, the data may not be explicitly linked to the programmes or was only available to current students through their intranet. One institution indicated that while the data could be found by prospective students, it probably was not clearly signposted. Another institution indicated that they were likely to put up some of this information on social media and YouTube, as their research suggested that prospective students were more likely to use these outlets for making judgements about the programme. All institutions did note that, based on the research, it raised issues on how they made information available to the students and ensured that the information is clearly signposted as well as highlighted for future prospective students.

Findings

While the QAA guidance documents have emphasised the importance of HEIs providing sufficient information for prospective students to enable them to make an informed choice regarding their higher education, the responsiveness of the universities to adopt these recommendations and guidance has been variable and at times formulaic.
The HEFCE-prescribed KIS has been adopted universally, but the attempts to provide additional information to aide prospective students in decision-making have been patchy as indicated by our study. Recruitment of ill-informed students, whose expectations from the course may be disengaged from the reality, would perhaps lead to consequent student dissatisfaction and would hinder their academic progress (Ozga and Sukhnandan, 1997).

In this study, a combination of content analysis and interview methods was used to assess the adequacy and the impact of the QAA recommended L&T information provided on the university websites. The results revealed a variation in the extent of information present on class size, student workload and teaching qualifications for the two programmes, with the size of the university and the levels of students' perception of the quality of the programmes. The main findings are:

1   Findings suggest that the QAA documents have not had a significant impact on how universities provide information for students. However, the quantitative data indicates that across most HEIs, some of these practices have been implemented. One of the reasons for this is that most of the universities indicated that how they determine what information they placed onto their websites were based on looking at their competitors' websites and ensuring similar information was available for their prospective students. It is therefore possible (but not measurable from this study) that the HEIs were learning from other institutions that had used the QAA documents to influence the information they have placed on their websites.
For example, the only HEI which filtered down the QAA information was an institution known for its good practice with students (according to the interviewee) and it is likely other institutions were looking at this institution to set the standard.

2   The variation in information was found to be greatest with quality scores, where HEIs with high quality scores presented more information. The high quality scores could be related to the presence of information on websites.

3   The variation with subject was found to be largely insignificant except in areas of resources and availability of specialist facilities. The information presented here was higher for Biological Sciences as information on aspects such as the presence of well-equipped laboratories can have significant influence on student learning and is therefore of interest to students.

4   Our results indicate that only one-fifth of the surveyed HEIs provided information on the class size for the various class types (lectures, seminars and laboratories). Closer inspection of the data suggested that a higher proportion of HEIs with high quality scores presented this information.

5   The teaching staff have a profound impact on the learning experiences of the students. Gibbs (2012) emphasised that it is important for the students to be aware of who does the teaching; whether they are full-time, part-time or hourly paid staff and whether they have teaching qualifications. This may have an impact on the quality of students' learning experience and as beneficiaries of HIM they are entitled to have access to this information. The results of our study indicated that universities in general appear to be doing well in providing information on the details of the 'facilitators of the class for the various class types' (lectures, seminars and laboratories).

6   Academics with teaching qualifications are rated higher by the students (Nasr et al, 1996; Gibbs and Coffey, 2004; HEPI, 2015). The BIS White Paper (BIS, 2011) had emphasised publishing anonymised information for prospective and current

students about teaching qualifications of their teaching staff. Despite the importance placed on the teaching qualifications of the staff as emphasised by the recommendations of the White paper (BIS, 2011) and in the QAA guidance document *Explaining Student Workload: Guidance about Providing Information for Students* (2013), the findings of our study indicated a complete lack of this information at institutional level and limited presence of this information at course and individual staff profile level. This may imply that either the academic staff may not have the desired teaching qualifications or the university still places more emphasis on research over teaching. Considering the importance students place on teaching qualifications of their teachers, HEPI (2015) has even recommended that KIS should be revamped to incorporate this information. Institutions that place heavier emphasis on research and administrative achievement, may risk the neglect of teaching (Gibbs, 2012).

7   Chickering and Gamson (1991) identified in their study 'faculty contact time' as one of the 'seven principles of Good Practice in undergraduate education'. Our study indicated a consistently high amount of information on student workload irrespective of the subject, size of the HEI and their quality scores. Expected contact time with the tutors was the only aspect of the student workload information, which had limited presence on the websites. However, universities with high quality scores presented significantly higher information even on the expected contact time. The views on the information about the importance of the amount of contact time for students are variable. Gibbs (2010) contends that the number of class contact hours on their own has little to do with educational quality but what happens with those hours determines quality. The Open University in spite of having the lowest class contact hours has high quality scores. Therefore, the contact hours at institutional level might not be of much value to the students on their own. However, the amount of hours spent in various L&T activities like lectures or seminars might be of particular importance for students (BIS, 2011). Institutions are encouraged to provide such information at subject and module level more prominently.

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