Annex A: Templates used in the pilot

This annex gives the three templates for qualitative information used in the pilot.

Template for publishing summaries of learning and teaching strategies

1. Name of institution or details of partnership

2. Date of review

3. Development of learning and teaching strategy
   A brief statement of what the institution wants to achieve with its learning and teaching strategy, ways in which it reflects the institution's mission and how it has been informed by previous experience in learning and teaching.

4. Content of the strategy
   A brief statement of:
   - Objectives which are explicitly linked to the institution's strategy
   - Ways in which the strategy is designed to meet the needs of an expanding and diverse student population
   - Policies, if any, designed to enhance the quality of learning and teaching.

5. Effectiveness of the strategy
   A brief statement of monitoring and evaluation procedures and assessment of the extent to which the strategy is succeeding.

6. Future development.
   Changes planned by the institution that are designed to further enhance the quality of learning and teaching.

Template for the publication of summaries of external examiners' reports

Information in published external examiner reports should be available to students and other stakeholders in a succinct and easily accessible form. In those institutions operating modular or multi-stage assessment schemes, it is recognised that there may be a number of module examiners' reports relevant to different award routes. In these circumstances, a report should be prepared by the chief examiner for each main programme or award. The report summaries should include the following information:

1. Name of institution

2. Award/award elements examined and UCAS reference

3. External examiners' home university or college or other professional/institutional affiliation and period of appointment.

4. Extent to which the institution's processes for assessment, examination and the determination of awards are sound and fairly conducted. [This would be a confirmatory statement that, from the evidence available to the examiner, the institution's processes for assessment, examination and the determination of awards are sound and fairly conducted; or if not, a statement of the respects in which they fall short.]

5. Extent to which the standards set are appropriate for the awards, or award elements, by reference to published national subject benchmarks, the national qualifications framework and institutional programme specifications. [This would be a confirmatory statement that, from the evidence available to the examiner, the standards set are appropriate; or if not, a statement of the respects in which they fall short.]

6. Extent to which the standards of student performance in programmes or parts of programmes examined are comparable with the standards of similar programmes or parts of programmes in other UK higher education institutions with which the examiner is familiar. [This would be a confirmatory statement that, from the evidence available to the examiner, the standards set are comparable with those applying at other HEIs with which he/she is familiar; or if not, a statement of the respects in which they fall short.]

7. Overview and comments/recommendations.
   A brief statement of any other issues or characteristics of the programme or processes not already covered in the summary which the examiner considers sufficiently significant in relation to present or future standards as to be worth drawing attention to the attention of external audiences. The statement would identify distinctive or innovative programme elements and notable strengths; and aspects which should be strengthened or risks which should be addressed in order to maintain confidence in standards on that programme.

Template for the summary of a periodic programme/departmental review

1. Programme, subject area, or department covered by the review

2. Date of review

3. Objectives of review

4. Conduct of the review
   A brief statement of how the review was conducted, who was involved, and what review methods they used.

5. Evidence base
   A brief statement of the evidence that was drawn on; and specifically what use was made of:
   - External examiners' reports
   - Reports (if any) from accrediting or other bodies
   - Staff and student feedback
   - Feedback from former students and their employers.

6. External peer contributors to process.
   A brief statement on how external peers were involved, how they were selected, and what their role was.

7. Overview of the main characteristics of the programmes covered by the review.
   A brief statement of the review team's overview of the programme in relation to content and approach, and notable strengths.

8. Conclusions on innovation and good practice.
   Identification of current aspects of the programmes which are particularly innovative or which represent good practice.

9. Conclusions on quality and practice.
   A brief statement of the review team's conclusions on whether intended learning outcomes are being obtained by students, quality and standards are being achieved, and the programme specification is being delivered.

10. Conclusions on whether the programme(s) remain current and valid in the light of developing knowledge in the discipline's practice in its application and developments in teaching and learning.

11. Forward looking recommendations for actions to remedy any identified shortcomings, and for further enhancement of quality and standards. These recommendations might adopt the institutional audit concept of distinguishing between aspects for commendation and aspects for improvement, with an indication of significance and urgency in the latter.

Annex B: Executive summary of the focus groups

1. The teaching quality information (TQI) prototype website was pilot tested among the following audiences:

- existing/potential students
- parents
- university staff
- careers teachers/advisors
- employers.

2. The research was intended to meet the following objectives:

   a. To investigate how respondents perceive the concept of the HEI teaching quality information web site. In particular:
      - appeal of the concept
      - propensity to use the site.

   b. To assess reactions to the prototype web site.

   c. To develop guidelines regarding:
      - appearance
      - location
      - navigation
      - contents.

3. The research was qualitative and used focus group, discussion group and telephone interview methods. The differences in methodology reflected different levels of knowledge of the concept under test and its context. All research was carried out in the Newcastle area.

   a. *Focus groups* were used in discussing the site with students and parents. The first group comprised A-level students planning to go to university and first year Newcastle or Northumbria University students, seven in total. The second comprised parents of A-level students planning to go to university or first year Newcastle or Northumbria University students, again seven in total.

   b. A *discussion group* was held, comprising academic administration staff from the Universities of Newcastle, Durham and Northumbria together with an advisor from the Connexions service.

   c. *Individual interviews* were held with four staff members from the FE/CTC sector (Gateshead, South Tyneside, Washington and Emmanuel Colleges) with careers advisory responsibilities, and with two employers (Entec UK and Service Network).

4. While each of those audiences has different needs from the site, there was a high level of agreement on the principal issues being considered. The following points summarise the key findings from the research as a whole.

   a. The pilot web site has a “professional” and “technical” appearance, which may deter young people from using it. An improved user interface should be a high priority in any full implementation so as to ensure higher take-up among would-be students than is likely in its current form.

b. Teachers/advisors and university staff were most likely to use the site and the former were the most positive about its potential usefulness.

c. Its design reflects “producer” rather than “user” needs and, in general, is too textually dense and visually bland. Professionals within education and guidance were the least critical, but still criticised aspects of its appearance.

d. The information contained in the site is somewhat specialist and some documents are of little direct relevance to potential HE entrants.

e. Information needs to be broken down, presented in a more graphical format and include provisos about its interpretation.

f. Navigation within the site is relatively good, though some minor changes were suggested.

g. The facility to readily compare data between *courses*, as distinct from subject areas, was raised as a desirable feature in any full development of the site.

5. Other points emerging from specific parts of the research included the following:

a. In the focus groups, both students and parents stressed the value of authoritative, unbiased information in making and supporting decisions about HE, indicating that this is not easily found at present.

b. TQI data is one small area within a much larger and complex decision-making process. Links to other web sites are therefore important, to place the information in a broader context. HE and careers staff considered some data presentation (statistical tables) to be open to misunderstanding and that more documentation or user help would be needed to enable best use of the site.

c. These groups also felt that some information was highly specialist in nature and of limited use to its intended users, while other information was not strictly factual.

d. The question of archiving past performance data was raised by HE staff.

6. This testing was the first opportunity for stakeholder and user groups to comment on their information needs in this area, following the decision to create a pilot site demonstrating the concepts set out in HEFCE 02/15. It seems that the idea of providing teaching quality information was widely accepted, particularly in respect of the needs of potential students. It is also clear that further development work is needed to ensure that such information is provided in a format that is readily comprehensible and in a style that is accessible and relevant to these users

Annex C: Stakeholder comments

Summary

1. Overall the response to the TQI site was positive and criticisms were constructive. The users liked the look and feel and the navigational capabilities of the HERO site. The majority of criticism and suggestions for improvement were based around the site's current unintentional ignorance of the various stakeholder groups' needs and level of understanding of the higher education structure and practices. It is still very much written by the HE community for the HE community. This surprised no one in the stakeholder groups. Explanation and presentation are the two fundamental areas of change and improvement required in order to ensure the site is as successful in practice as it be in theory.

2. The level of explanation currently available on the site through the screens is viewed as insufficient. TQI needs explaining, in terms of what it stands for, how it is measured, and its purpose and significance to the institution and therefore to the stakeholder. An explanatory section on the welcome page, whereby the stakeholders select the category into which they fall and are subsequently presented with an explanation tailored for them and what would be assumed to be their level of understanding, was suggested. Each report and review needs a brief explanation so that the users can decide if it will provide the information they require without having to trawl through the text. Many participants found acronyms off-putting. HESA, HEFCE and HERO all need short explanations for many stakeholders. A glossary of terms and phrases is a possible solution, or the use of some other titles.

3. The presentation of the quantitative data was the cause for substantial comment. The tables in their present state were described as "cluttered", "amateurish" and "confusing." The tables need to be more clearly defined with proper headings, better alignment, explanations, definitions of the HE terminology (e.g. Tariff points) and a key that is not easily missed or mistaken for an error message. Other visual representation of the data is needed in addition to the tables in order to make it easier to interpret at a glance and make it more user-friendly for visually impaired users, for example pie charts and bar graphs. The users want the option to view the statistics for more than one course/institution at the same time for the purpose of comparison.

4. The actual content of the quantitative data was appreciated and thought to be very useful. However, some extensions were sought. These included "real" drop out rates from a course, numbers of applicants to number of places ratios, and more information at a finer level of granularity provided so as to enable comparisons. This contrasts with the sector's views which often seek to avoid comparison-enabling facilities.

5. In general, the reports and reviews were considered too lengthy, especially when reading the reports for more than one subject/institution, and were written in HE speak with a lot of jargon. Headings, bullet points and summaries, all of which are dynamic, combined with a couple of sentences explaining what each report should contain and

achieve, would enable the user to identify which information they are interested in. This is in part caused by the lack of formatting facilities in the prototype site.

6. The main cosmetic criticisms included lack of demarcation and separation, poor layout and presentation of text, and some inaccurate grammar and therefore poor scripting. The universities' titles should be clearer and accurate (stakeholders generally believed that accurate equalled UCAS) with their web links centrally presented so as not to be missed.

7. The navigational links were highly commended and the site was considered overall as easy to use. More links to other information were requested including information on the overall learning experience, information on the city/area in which the institution is located, transport links, accommodation, and information on the social side of university life. Links to UCAS and the push guides could satisfy this request. The links to the institutions' own web sites were appreciated.

Introduction

8. Due to problems with some focus groups being small and one group discussion degenerating into a "my university is worse than yours" debate, a further set of user testing was needed to complete the research into the usability of the site and the evaluation of its usefulness from the perspective of the stakeholders. This annex reports on the results of this process.

9. The final HERO TQI web site will be used by a variety of stakeholders. These have so far been identified as the following:

- potential students
- potential employers
- parents of students
- the British Council and similar bodies
- government bodies
- voluntary organisations
- foreign institutions
- careers advisors
- academe

10. Individuals from some of these potential user groups were approached to participate in the testing of the pilot. This kind of testing was different to the focus group testing and evaluation. A corollary of focus group testing is that there is often a tendency to digress or dissect a single aspect for the entire session rather than covering the wide scope of points, positive and negative, required. Without proper instruction the purpose of the group can be easily overlooked.

11. Accordingly, each of the individual testers was provided with a more detailed portfolio of explanatory documents including an explanation of the pilot project, a set of

scenarios in order to aid the adoption of the relevant persona, and a questionnaire to be answered upon completion of the experimentation. These papers were supplemented by a one to one discussion and explanation of the site, its purpose and what was required from them as testers, which the focus group participants did not all receive. The users were then left to navigate their way round the site, search for information they felt stakeholders would expect to see, note any thoughts, reactions and comments and complete the questionnaire.

12. Twelve people completed the questionnaire out of a total set of 28 approached. Several of the ones not completing the questionnaire made comments, often of a detailed nature.

Results

Welcome screen

13. When asked about the options on the welcome screen the response from all the testers was a positive one.

- Good, simple to use with not too many options which can often result in confusion.
- The only 2 options really needed are those provided i.e. course selection and place of study.
- The search function is excellent as that covers anything else and would be the user's first action if searching from scratch.
- The course arrangement link was easy to follow, showing everything necessary to select a subject area/course and is very useful for those unfamiliar with the coding system and which courses come under which subject area.

14. The following suggestions were made by four of the users:

a. A help button with FAQs would be useful as users tend to return to the homepage when lost.

b. A link that would take the user to a couple of worked examples illustrating how to find courses and institutions and so on.

c. A guide for the different stakeholders is needed. For parents the introduction and instructions for navigation and the explanation of TQI and how it's measured and the examples used in demonstrating this would be different to that of potential employers or the British Council. There should be a list of the various stakeholders on the welcome page, the user then clicks on the appropriate category to be taken to a suitably tailored page. It is all currently written from and for an HE perspective.

d. A "How to use the Site" link leading to another page would be helpful. This page could give examples of people for whom the site might be useful (similar to the examples in the *User Testing Scenarios* supplied). It could detail the route of a sample search, including the aims of the visitor to the site and how they fulfil them. Instances of information that can be gleaned, or comparisons that can be made on the site, could be mentioned.

Search facility

15. The users were asked if there were any parts of the search process that were confusing.

a. Four participants said no, also commenting that the search pathways were logical.
b. Three users felt the map could be confusing if the user wasn't sure which region the institution they were looking for is in. A search box option whereby the user can type in the name of the institution and be taken straight to the next stage as if they had selected the correct region was suggested. Alternatively, an alphabetical list of the universities would be useful. The map was, however, considered useful.
c. Information about the area around the institutions, accommodation, campus details, transport links etc was requested. Perhaps a link to a site that can provide this information?
d. One user commented that, for the OU, Religious Studies is under the Historical and Philosophical subject area and that this did not seem obvious or logical.

Missing facilities

16. Were there avenues you wanted to take but were unable to?

a. Four of the users said no.
b. Suggestions included:
- The ability to combine the search areas of course and place of study.
- A search box to type in the name of the institution.
- A summary of all the courses available and the institutions that offer them.
- The site should make available the same search mechanisms as UCAS.
- The user will want to compare. For example, the user will want to be able to pick 3 medieval dentistry courses from different universities and have all their statistics up on the screen at the same time to compare. This can be done on other sites.
- Currently the course list cannot be accessed from anywhere other than the welcome page.
- From the *External examiners' report* page, a link to the statistical data (in order to compare with comments made) was required but not available. The route is actually via *Subject level.* Perhaps this link could be called *"Subject level (including Statistical Data").*

Freedom to search

17. Was the search too directed or restricted at any point?

a. Overall it was felt by the participants that the site was not restrictive but necessarily logically and well directed. There was concern that otherwise it may become confusing for potential students and that due to the large number of courses available some direction is required.

b. One user commented that you have to return to the homepage and start the search again for comparative purposes but also noted that this wasn't necessarily a problem.

Missing links

18. Were there any points where a particular link would have been useful?

a. The responses were very positive with praise being given to the navigation and the links that are currently available. The links to the institutions' own web sites in particular were appreciated and considered important.

b. Suggestions for links included:

- A general overview/introduction to the university rather than having to open up another browser window for the university's own site.
- A short cut route for students that know which course and university so they can type the relevant requirements and get put directly through to the information about the course and institution all on the same page.
- Links to universities' own web sites: for example if looking at Business Studies at an HEI, a link to that HEI's business school's home page would be useful.
- Links to UCAS.
- Two users felt that links to information regarding the learning experience, accommodation and the social side at institutions were needed i.e. a link to UCAS/Push guides.

c. Further comments included:

- Would it be possible on the eventual site to search for say:
    - Accounting and North East?
    - Accounting and pro-active approach?
    - Accounting and tariff range better than 215-275?

  Such facilities would be very useful.
- While the search for accounting brought up 7 institutions, the reality would be many more, particularly for popular subjects. At this stage it would be useful to sort the courses by area, entry requirements, or a number of other indicators such as tariff scores.

Quantitative data

19. Is the quantitative data easy to interpret?

a. There were conflicting views amongst the users here. Whilst three felt that it was fine to interpret, the remaining testers brought up other issues that they felt needed resolving:

- "The statistical data selected should be presented on their own rather than being surrounded by the other tables."
- "What are tariff points? Explanations are needed." (A number of stakeholders picked up on this issue)
- "It took a few goes to understand the columns i.e. that it was number of students and then a %. It should be clearer and maybe set out in proper tables for easy read-across viewing."
- "Does ~ mean N/A? The key is dire. PCNT is an odd way of expressing %."
- "The terminology would be daunting for an ill-educated parent. What is a HESA? What is HEFCE? I am less confused when I get to the tables as they are elementary. Why not simply click on statistical data and scroll through rather than having 5 links that lead to tables on the same page? It will unclutter the site."
- "If I was a potential student I think that as soon as I saw HESA and HEFCE data in the stats I would be put off by the acronyms. I think a student would access a site that said statistical data then that could lead to a more self-explanatory choice of stats."
- "Graphs and charts would make the information more accessible."
- "The key whereby ~ = values <5 is really bad as it looks like an error message. The key should also be at the top of the page."
- "In the *Common Job Types* section, we are told that there were 15 Chartered Accountants, or 35 to a Graduate job, for instance – but not how many leavers there were in total. We need to know how many in order to interpret whether this was a large or small proportion of the total leavers."
- "I do not understand the *Completion Data* section. There is a First Year table and an All Years table. I would have thought it would make more sense to see how many people complete the *final* years as compared with the first, or other years. (However, perhaps I have failed to understand the relevance of this section.)"
- "It should be made very clear to which academic year the data refers."

<u>Other data</u>

20. Is there any data missing that you would expect/wish to see?

a. One user felt that the data available provided exactly the kind of information users would want and was particularly impressed by the data regarding careers and employment post-graduation.

b. Three users requested drop out/failure rates. Other suggestions included:

- Layout of course structure – i.e. which modules are included in the course, which are core and which are optional.

- Past years' grades for each module – this would be useful for students choosing modules each year.
- Inclusion of provision for/number of disabled students – this might be provided by the institution's own site.
- The number of applicants against the number of places for the institution for specific courses.
- The Tariff averages and ranges in comparison with the national averages and ranges – perhaps on the right hand side of the screen.
- Links to compare the data with that of a similar course at a different institution (in a box to the right of the table).
- Links to the previous year's data (or this could then come up as a different coloured bar on a bar graph to make comparison between this year's data and, for instance, the data of 2 years ago). In this way a visitor can gauge the course's performance over a period of time.

<u>Presentation</u>

21. Do you think the presentation of the data could be improved?

a. The overall opinion was that the statistical data needed improving visually. Only two participants felt that the tables offered simplicity and were therefore sufficient.

b. Suggestions for the improvement of the statistical data were as follows:

- "Charts – the tables should still be there but in addition to pie charts to break up the page and make it easier to look at, at a glance."
- "The user should be able to click on a statistics table and be presented with a pie chart to display the results in a more user-friendly format."
- "There should be some explanation. Students don't want to have to try and interpret it – they want quick answers so bullet points explaining the data might reconfirm what the data is trying to show."
- "Colours and titles should be used to make clear distinctions between data sets."
- "The stats need to be improved for those with visual impairments or other reading needs by being more spaced out and in a larger font. Pictorial representation might be useful – could this be offered as an interactive feature?"
- "Pie charts and bar graphs would be more aesthetically pleasing and would make the data clearer. The figures look too squashed on the page with no space between them."
- "Needs explanation and verbal summaries under the tables/graphs. Bullet points are straight to the point."
- "The links for the different data sets should lead to tables on separate pages. The current layout is very amateurish, too close together and cluttered. The content is fine but need the same look and feel as the rest of the site. The tables should be centre aligned."

- “Perhaps some way of comparing different institutions ratings/reviews using tables/graphics? Some form of ratings scheme would be useful. This would enable the checking of important criteria, for example all institutions offering free post-graduate career advice.”
- “It is confusing that all the data is on one page. It would be preferable if each of the tables had a separate page with links to the other four tables.”
- “The tables are fairly clear, but pie charts (to show proportions of 1sts etc) and bar graphs for year to year, or institution to national average comparison, would be easier to interpret.”

Institutional review and subject level reports

22. Are there any reviews or reports that you don’t understand?

a. Three of the participants claimed to have fully understood the reports and reviews. However, it was stressed by the majority of the testers that the reports were not written in layperson’s terms. Of the three that had no problems understanding the reports, one felt that that was purely due to the fact that she had been at university with positions in student unions for four years and so had become familiar with HE speak. The acronyms were also considered to be off-putting.
b. The reports and reviews were generally criticised for being too lengthy and their relevance was sometimes questioned. It needs to be noted that users will more than likely be comparing two or more institutions and courses, so concise bullet pointed and clearly headed summaries is what will be required.
c. One participant, whilst noting that many of the reports were test site versions, commented that although most of the reports made sense, many were incomplete, that there was little consistency of style nor in many cases of content.

Style

23. Do you find the writing style appropriate?

a. Three users raised the issue of lengthiness in response to this question.
b. The reports and reviews were categorised as being written in Higher Education style which is a narrative style considered as unappealing to most stakeholders. Some of the language was considered specific and technical. One user suggested a glossary of terms and acronyms be included in addition to a FAQ link for certain phrases e.g. tariff values.

Layout

24. What do you think of the layout/presentation of the reports?

a. The main issue referred to here was the amount of writing on each page and the lack of separation and demarcation. Headings, bullet points, summaries, all of which are dynamic, could be combined with the use of colour so the user can click on the section they are interested and be directed straight there rather than having to trawl through information they are not interested in. Each viewing area contains a lot of information, so an option to remove some screen elements was suggested to allow the user to focus on the main area of interest.

b. Short statements with links to further information should the user wish to read on, and a quick view "4 star 5 star" system with the full report also available were two suggestions to address the length problem.

c. Two users commented that, when the user reaches the institutional level reports the layout of the page with the institutions' titles on is poor. One institution has a logo that unfortunately uses a palette that is close to the base colours of the site and so does not stand out. The institution's title should be on a separate line so that the whole title fits with the link to the institutions' own website underneath. There needs to be more of a marked home page for each institution with a general introduction/overview for each. Consistency is required with the use of capital letters and '&' or 'and' and so on. (Note: these and some others are actually criticisms of official lists and suggestions for technical standardisation – contrary to the flexibility requirement of HEIs).

Explanation

25. Are the reviews/reports clearly explained?

a. The majority of testers felt that potential undergraduates would need further explanation. An explanation of where and why these reports originated would be useful, particularly for first time visitors. For example, who writes the reports and against what criteria are HEIs measured. A link to a page with information on the background of the reports ought to be included. There should be short explanations of the purpose of each report and what it includes and then a link to the review/report on a separate page should the user wish to read it having read the explanation.

b. A link on every page to a glossary of terms was a particularly useful suggestion that would satisfy much of the discontentment regarding the lack of explanation. This is especially necessary for abbreviations. One participant came across 'ESC' in a subject level report, and 'ICT' in a Learning and Teaching Strategy. It is easy for stakeholders to give up when faced with "flexible jargon".

General comments

26. Some of the users made additional comments on aspects of the site that they found particularly useful or those which were in need of work.

a. "The way the site is now, a student wouldn't bother to read the reports because they have to read through a lot before reaching the information they are really interested in."

b. "The tool section is useful, especially the save page for later option."

c. “The link to the university’s own website is excellent.”

d. “I enjoyed the links to the institutions’ own websites. The HERO site could be shorter with good data to allow comparison between institutions using the same style throughout. There is probably more data that would be available that is useful and would help the user make selections. Overall the site is easy to use and quick to pick up. The search facilities work well.”

e. “The idea behind the website is an excellent one. It will make the task of researching higher education a lot easier and quicker, possibly enabling students to make a much more informed decision. As well as answering questions it also raises plenty – things that really need to be considered. Career options post study for example, something that I didn’t really give a great deal of thought to when choosing my place of study.”

f. “The overall presentation needs work. There needs to be more involvement with UCAS. UCAS have a link to HERO. UCAS list their institutions alphabetically and ignore where the institutions put ‘University of.’ The TQI site and UCAS should list in the same way as users are likely to go from UCAS to HERO and vice versa.”

g. “In the *Subject Reports*, there could be a link to ‘Course Components/Options’, and a link to information on the weighting of final exams/continuous assessment etc. (Obviously all this information would be readily available in the institution’s prospectus, but since it will be of interest to many visitors to the site it seems sensible to have these links here.)”

h. “There are a lot of typos on the site – presumably that is because it is a test site but close attention should be paid to the proof reading of the final material, as errors such as these tend to undermine the visitor’s confidence in the reliability of the site’s content.”

Annex D: Pilot HEI comments

Summary

1. The overall response from most of the six pilot institutions was positive and any criticisms made were constructive with the view to enhancing the accuracy, smooth implementation and general success of the site.

2. The fundamental issue raised by all the pilot institutions was the mapping of the relationship between external examiner allocation and courses/programmes. Institutions vary in structure, the OU being an extreme example. Most institutions made suggestions with the view to overcoming this potential problem. De Montfort devised a simple diagram to express a possible mapping system (presented as Annex E). It was generally accepted that adaptations, some subtle, others more fundamental, in the internal systems of the institutions would have to be made to facilitate the efficient creation of summaries.

3. Whilst inputting issues mainly consisted of the current lack of formatting capabilities, disappearing data, and the absolute need for the error message to clearly indicate which field has exceeded the character limit, the institutions found the cutting and pasting of the information straightforward. However, an automated uploading template has been requested and will be provided.

4. The external examiners' summaries were a cause for concern for all the institutions in terms of ownership, liability, payment, the institutions' right to publish (or not), and the opportunity for institutions to query any comments. There was a unanimous worry that, by summarising for a non-academic audience within a word limit, there is a risk of the summaries becoming bland and standardised, thus losing their cultural value and becoming of little use to the stakeholders.

5. Further issues concerning resources – including staff recruitment and staff training, especially external examiners – were outlined, each with the view to achieving the systems necessary for the institutions to comply with the philosophy of the site. The majority of the institutions seemed keen to continue their involvement with the development of the site. This is an encouraging result for the pilot.

Introduction

6. Six higher education institutions were asked to participate in the HEFCE 02/15 pilot project for a Teaching Quality Information (TQI) website; Cambridge, De Montfort University, KIAD, Open University, Liverpool, and University of Northumbria at Newcastle. One aspect of their involvement was the inputting of data in the form of institutional and subject area level reports on to the site. Throughout this process the pilot HEIs were extremely forthcoming with comments, suggestions and queries. This feedback was recorded and where possible issues were resolved immediately as the pilot progressed.

7. Each institution was asked to submit a pilot report outlining their involvement, any problems they encountered and overall comments, views and suggestions for the implementation of the ‘real’ TQI to be feasible and successful. This annex summarises the main software related parts of these reports. The costs anticipated by the pilots are detailed in Annex H.

The University of Cambridge

Cambridge's report had been split into key areas for ease of summarisation:

1. <u>Data input</u>:
    a. Cambridge felt that the "outlines and templates were not easy to use or marry with previous requests for information" so the cut and paste process was undertaken by senior staff who adapted information to fit the template.
    b. For the final system Cambridge would require extra staff. Cambridge suggest that "with a template and automated uploading, training would be minimal, but support would be required in the event of problems."
    c. Cambridge struggled with the character limits on the templates and feel "strongly that character limits of whatever length will reduce the usefulness" of the summaries. Their solution was links to their own site, which "seemed to be well received."
    d. Cambridge experienced disappearance of data which is an issue that is now solved.
    e. Cambridge suggest that the ability to order the list of examiners' reports in one subject area would be better "or have some indication of how ordering is accomplished."
    f. The system messages regarding character restrictions need to be specific and indicate the field exceeding the limit to save time unnecessarily re-entering data in other fields.
    i. The headings and the templates did not completely match.

2. <u>Resulting site</u>:
    a. Cambridge found it "difficult to navigate, compare institutions, and link pieces of information to relevant courses."
    b. "The blandness of the qualitative data makes it difficult to really measure the culture or standards of the institutions."
    c. "The numerical data makes little sense."

3. <u>Implementation</u>:
    a. "Cambridge currently receives no [external examiners'] reports electronically thus a vast amount of time and resource would be required for transcribing reports into electronic format."
    b. Cambridge "estimates a lead-time of a year would be needed to allow for the adjustment of information collection systems, training of staff including external examiners, and development of procedures. Staff training would be required for web authoring and the drafting of qualitative reports as they would be being produced for different (non-academic) audiences."
    c. "The individual fields suggested in the formats do not necessarily coincide with the information that is derived by Cambridge's procedures."
    d. Cambridge feel that "use of a standard template is dictating how [they] run these processes" and that in order to use the template which does not correspond with their review their internal systems will have to be changed.

4. <u>External examiners</u>:
Cambridge raised some common issues in their report concerning: copyright and report ownership; the ability of institutions to request amendments; liability; payment; the “serious risk of undermining the institutional process of receiving frank and honest reports that are necessary for ensuring [their] high standards” thus leading “to bland, run-of-the-mill summaries of no use either to the HEI nor to external stakeholders”; the problems predicted in writing a summary for a programme reported on by multiple externals. Cambridge is “much more in favour of reporting at whatever level [they] feel is the most informative.”

5. <u>Timing</u>:
Cambridge anticipates any new reporting arrangements to occur in the academic year 2004-05.

6. <u>General comments</u>:
Cambridge “maintain that the robustness and accuracy of information that [they] choose to publish is more appropriately monitored by QAA in their institutional visits, than by mandatory publication of summary information.”

De Montfort University (DMU)

DMU have split their report into five sections which address the main areas of the pilot project.

1. In the light of their experience as a pilot institution, De Montfort have identified five key components that institutions, including themselves, will need to consider and act upon before, during, and post implementation.

   a. The templates completed by the externals need to include a summary section so there is no need for the institution to summarise and the externals have control over their summaries. This does however raise the issue whereby the external may wish to bring an issue to the attention of the institution without it becoming public, sometimes before a problem even occurs. Matters that name staff or students are good examples. De Montfort "are keen that externals are not in any way discouraged from making such comments" and so have planned to retain a section for the attention of the university only.

   b. DMU intends that externals will have to complete their reports electronically, despite the risk of discouragement and the training costs this would incur.

   c. The institutions' own websites should support and complement the publication of information and the HERO site.

   d. "The information required [for the periodic review] to feed into the summary for the HERO website should be easily identified and extracted."

   e. DMU sees the solution to the issue of the relationship between external examiners and courses being a many-to-many relationship (one which has been raised by the majority of pilots), as being a simple exploitation of the fact that HERO is based on a relational database that supports such structures, managed and updated by the institutions.

2. DMU has noted the following information uploading issues in need of amendment:

   a. The headings on the site do not match the template nor did other elements. DMU give the example of subject reference.

   b. The character limits need clearer definition, e.g. individual fields, HTML tags etc.

   c. "Descriptive error codes are required across the board."

   d. An issue DMU clearly felt strongly about is the need for formatting capability. DMU "believe that the ability to present information in a more informative manner (tables, bullet points, highlighted text), coupled with more links would greatly increase the usefulness of the site."

3. With regard to the issue of mapping external examiner reports to individual programmes, "DMU has trialled two approaches to summarising the reports: one where all reports are published as individual summaries and the other where a summary report is published for each subject area."

4. DMU's response to external examiner reports is to extend their annual report from the External Examiner Audit Group to address broad institution-wide themes.

5. DMU felt that on the resulting website the overview sections “appear at a higher level than the full reports” thus discouraging the user to continue to the full report and consequently meaning the text in these overview sections needs to be positive. “HEIs will need to be clearly informed about this two-tier structure and its implications.”

6. General comments
DMU was concerned that the considerable diversity within large institutions such as themselves be recognised and not disadvantaged in any way by being more difficult for users to access the information. “It would be a concern if potential students were discouraged from seeking information about DMU courses because the structure of the web site was designed primarily to suit single subject provision.” The relationship between external examiners and courses/programmes needs to be identified, in general and across different locations.

Kent Institute of Art and Design (KIAD)

Like DMU, KIAD have split their experience as a pilot and suggestions for successful implementation into 5 areas for consideration within which the main issues are summarised.

1. KIAD feels there needs to be clear distinction between quality assurance material for internal and for public use, and that a TQI standards officer is required to "translate academic speak" for the public. KIAD also felt that whilst the use of links to institutions' own web sites is to be commended, there is also the risk of undermining the basis of the exercise if HERO became just a set of links.

2. KIAD "is in the process of putting together programme specifications for each of its individual courses and is, therefore, not in a position to take part in the proposed link project."

3. The issue of external examiners is one to which KIAD devotes a large proportion of its report.

   a. Summary of reports: KIAD propose that external examiners take responsibility for summarising their reports and that "institutions must be given the opportunity to respond (on the web site)" to these summaries. KIAD propose that an institutional statement explaining how the institution runs its curriculum be added to the external examiner summaries. KIAD suggests that for modular programmes the chief/senior external produces an overall summary for the public and that the subject external examiner summaries remain internal to the institution, which would encourage external examiners to continue to be open and would reduce training costs.
   b. Training: KIAD feel external examiners must be supported in writing the summaries and that such "training could be provided through electronic self-instruction."
   c. Additional costs: These include training, indemnification against potential litigious statements, and higher fees for the additional responsibility.
   d. UCAS subject codes: A brief note explaining that art institutions offer Route B as well as Route A to avoid confusion amongst students.

4. The quantitative data provided by HEFCE and HESA was a cause of concern for KIAD, who felt that if the data were to be rounded to the nearest 5 FTE learners it "would have dramatic consequences for small institutions as data skewed in this way could potentially present quite substantial false positive or negative swings." Guidelines would be required, as in the current format the data is confusing for the user. The data would also be more informative if it were at course level as it would then relate better to the external examiner summaries.

5. KIAD had four main issues regarding the EPIC software:

   a. Data loading: KIAD felt the following were required: validation checks for each section of the template; character limits for each field of the templates should be marked at the point of entry; users should be informed instantly when the character limit has been exceeded. This is in line with the feedback from the other pilots.

b. Web front end: Whilst impressed with the look and feel of the site, KIAD request that the whole of the overview for the external examiner summaries be included at the top level.

c. Character limits: KIAD felt that the original character limits imposed on the reports were more than sufficient for institutions to keep to, and considered the relaxation of these limits after they had entered their material “absurd.” “The results of this pilot must ensure that brevity is to be commended at all times.” KIAD is concerned that potential students and users will be deterred by too lengthy material, “which defeats the primary objective of the whole exercise.”

d. External examiners’ summaries: The comparability statement is unnecessary. KIAD hopes that the distinction made between the external examiner summaries within Art & Design be maintained in the future software. KIAD feels the summaries should be date stamped and that “more formatting should be undertaken to the back end system.”

The University of Liverpool

The University of Liverpool covered three main areas (excluding costs) in their report; inputting data, response to request for comments in the report dated 22 March 2003, and using the HERO site.

1. Inputting data:
    a. Liverpool feel that formatting including bullet points and indentation is required.
    b. Character limits and what they include for each field should be clear, as should the field responsible for exceeding the character limit when it occurs.
    c. For the external examiner's period of appointment either a start and end date should be given or a statement indicating which year of their appointment the external is in rather than when their appointment ends.
    d. "The templates do not recognise programme codes of any format other than alpha-number-number-number. This means it is impossible to input programme codes for joint honours programmes in the correct place."
    e. "Clicking for information about hyperlinks wipes out all the information that has been put into a template."
    f. "The 'objectives of review' section has been removed from the periodic review section of the template."
    g. Liverpool suggest that automatic upload of the templates would be more efficient than cutting and pasting each field.
    h. Liverpool found the speed at which EPIC responded to problems impressive and wanted to know if that would continue when the project is 'live'.

2. Response to request for comments in the report dated 22 March 2003:
    a. Liverpool feel that the external examiners authoring the summaries will lead to less critical reports and the sanitization of the current system and the possibility of externals writing separately to VCs. The extra training suggested is feared to be "off-putting" for externals and there was concern that the publication of externals' names could lead to unsolicited mail from students and potential legal implications.
    b. Liverpool operate both programme and module based external examining and feel that changes to their existing system should not be rushed. Liverpool feel that identifying joint/combined honours students and assigning an external to such programmes will not be problematic as "HEI databases will be able to identify these cohorts and most of us have an identified examiner who has responsibility for these programmes."
    c. "We would strongly recommend that [programme specifications] be hosted on the institution's own site, with web-links leading to them being created on the HERO site" rather than the suggestion that they be published via the HERO portal which was not an original recommendation of the HEFCE 02/15 report.

3. Using the HERO site:

   a. Liverpool considers the site quick and easy to locate specific HEIs but "wordy" and "daunting" for the user.

   b. Quantitative data: Liverpool expressed concern about the lack of explanation and level of detail, particularly in relation to the section on job types data, which could result in misinterpretation and inaccurate judgements being made. In a number of cases not all the students are accounted for: for example, of 120 graduates, job types are only given for 35. The data on unemployment is also considered misleading and possibly bad for the institution. There should be explanations for the figures, for example graduates may be unemployed by choice to go travelling. Liverpool feel the job types section needs to be expanded and be more detailed. 'PCNT' also needs to be expressed as '%'.

   c. External examiners' reports: "Will the user know what an external examiner is?" The list of programmes should consist of one programme per line.

The University of Northumbria at Newcastle

UNN provided an executive summary of their report, which is as follows.

1. "Northumbria University can be seen as characteristic of many universities that have part-modularised structures. It has a large number of joint and specialised programmes creating issues for provision of data at programme level. It has a school structure that does not map easily onto JACS codes.

2. External examiners are, in the majority of cases, appointed to clusters of modules rather than programmes, and a two-tier Exam Board system is operated. If the TQI pilot leads to a requirement that external examiner reports are published by programme, this will require Northumbria to substantially alter existing practices, involving additional (unquantified) costs.

3. The possibility of entering a 'No Report' where agreement with the external examiner cannot be obtained is welcomed, as is the proposal that a section of the external examiner report template be provided for explanation of follow-up actions.

4. Consultation with external examiners indicates a preference for the published template not to name them.

5. External examiner report templates have been modified so that, in future, the published summary will form the introduction to the full report. Explanation and exemplars will need to be provided to examiners; a HEFCE information sheet would be welcomed.

6. Internal review templates have been modified to include the published summary. It will, however, be some years before review reports are available for all disciplines. Ad hoc arrangements will be needed in the interim period.

7. Data was obtained for JACS codes L and N. Four of Northumbria's 11 schools were involved in supplying this as well as university level services. Issues were identified in data capture and preparation, including limitations of the templates. Many of these issues relate to the pilot and will not apply in the real version.

8. Data input was generally straightforward, carried out by a temporary person who required little training.

9. The resulting website was considered well-designed by the Northumbria reviewer; some improvements in consistency of text presentation and contextualisation of quantitative data are recommended.

10. Northumbria has a number of organisational issues to resolve for full implementation. HEFCE guidance on the form of student survey is required to finalise work on preparing for this aspect."

The Open University (OU)

The OU is not standard in its structure or operation. Students register for a module rather than a programme or award and may not always have an award intention. The OU's entirely modular and open-entry approach means that they "still focus much of their QA at course (module) level, and appoint external assessors and external examiners to courses rather than awards". Consequently, the OU experienced a different set of issues from other pilot institutions.

1. Data capture and preparation
   a. The OU did not complete the commentary on the findings of the externals "because of the mismatch between the OU's use of externals (at course level) and the external advisors' reports we have used to complete the HERO requirement at award level."
   b. The OU found that the 750-word limit for the summary of the L&T strategy restrictive.
   c. The summaries of HEIs' links with employers etc was "difficult to draft within the word limit and brought home the fact that we were trying to satisfy the needs of a wide range of stakeholders."
   d. In terms of resources required, apart from time spent redrafting reports to accord with character limits, statements relating to "subject provision involve a review of process in relation to external examiner input and internal review."

2. Data input
   a. The OU's data was input by a temporary secretary easily by cutting and pasting.
   b. Like the other pilots, the OU had problems with word limits and data disappearing.

3. The resulting site
   a. The OU feel that if the list of subjects under "subject areas" are not hyperlinked then a guidance note to return to the front page for individual subjects is needed.
   b. The OU had formatting issues e.g. bullet points, spacing and text wrapping.
   c. "Clearer information about the nature of the data available" is needed.
   d. The OU would like the reference under English region for the OU to be changed from N/A to something more positive, for example All Regions or National.
   e. Quantitative data:
      - The terms used for the table headings need to be consistent and accurate. Some are currently misleading. The tables need to be clearly divided.
      - The section on proportion of young students entering with A-levels/Highers and the tariff points table is not applicable to the OU so needs to be removed. The OU suggest a more appropriate list of entry qualifications.

- The data on degree/qualification obtained was cause for concern as many at the OU study for credits, certificates and diplomas.
- The terms used need to be fully explained i.e. "'leavers' is misleading and wrong." There is no provision for those who take a year out.
- "Destination" is different for a mature part time student than a young full time student.

4. <u>How would you implement a full system?</u>

a. The OU currently use external advisors at programme level, not external examiners, but "are considering a change of designation from EAs to EEs at award level."

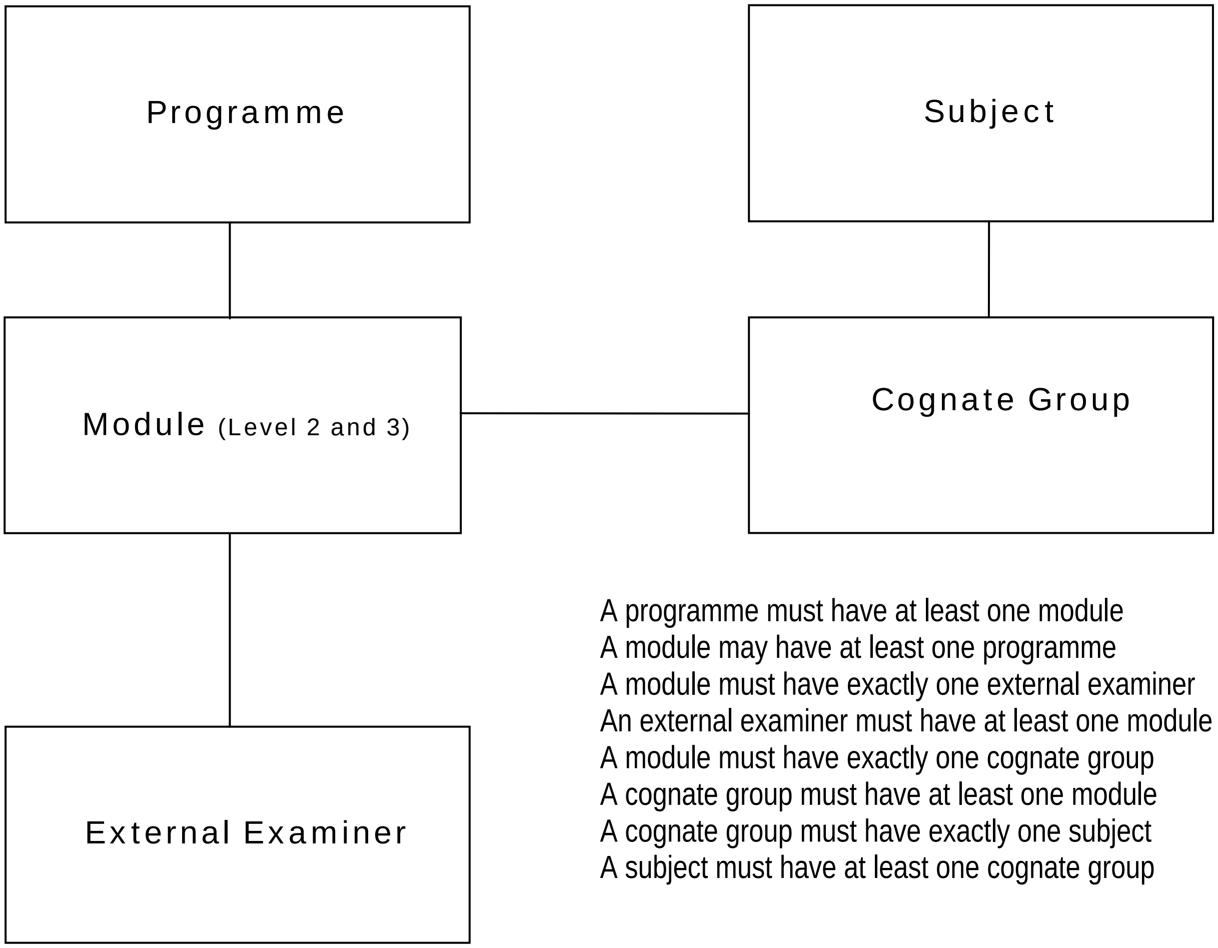
b. Regarding the quality of reports, the OU feel the problem is when the externals comments are "brief if a course or programme is established and going well, and reflect an ongoing relationship" preventing the detail being helpful externally.

c. Whilst the OU feel that the HEI "must be able to reserve the right not to publish reports that could potentially lead them into legal and other problems," they would expect their external advisors to provide a well-balanced summary and to be requested to produce all source documents at audit. The OU had assumed the HEI's response would be included in the following year's summary.

d. The OU would not expect to involve external advisors/external examiners in this project until 2005.

e. The OU would like to be informed of the ongoing role of the QAA in relation to TQI.

Annex E: One possible entity relationship structure
(Provided by De Montfort University)



A programme must have at least one module
A module may have at least one programme
A module must have exactly one external examiner
An external examiner must have at least one module
A module must have exactly one cognate group
A cognate group must have at least one module
A cognate group must have exactly one subject
A subject must have at least one cognate group

Annex F: External examiners’ comments

Summary

1. Opinion was divided amongst the panel of external examiners between those who wanted to take responsibility for their reports and author the summaries, and those who were accountability averse and saw their role as being essentially hidden and therefore did not want their responsibility and especially their visibility to increase.

Introduction

2. Following the meeting of HEFCE QAC, a meeting was held with De Montfort University, who had been involving their external examiners in the pilot project. It was proposed that a small number of their externals should be approached to participate in an evaluation of the summaries produced from their full reports. Five accepted the invitation to participate and were subsequently provided with an explanation of the TQI pilot, its origin and purpose, and a questionnaire to complete covering the issues surrounding the summary template, publishing, and further training requirements. One further external, involved in the production of summaries on the site, also filled out the questionnaire.

3. Having looked at their reports, the summaries that have derived from them and the templates, the external examiners were asked to answer and comment on the following questions and issues.

<u>Template</u>

a. Is the template reasonable? Are there omissions or things that should not be there?
b. If you were filling in the template would you have produced an entry the same as that produced from your report on your behalf? If not, how would it differ?
c. Do you think you should be filling in the template in the full system?

<u>Publishing</u>

d. How would do you feel about your name being published with your report?
e. Would publication affect your report/summary in terms of style and content?
f. What control would you wish to have over the published summary?
g. How would you see something being produced that was fair, reflected your views and avoided conflicts with the institution/public?

<u>Other</u>

h. What training or preparation would be needed?
i. Would the knowledge that the report and summary would be made available to the QAA (as the report is now) from time to time affect the rest of your report?
j. Any other comments?

Results

4. Three out of the five external examiners invited to participate responded with detailed comments and one with a general overview. Despite there being such a low level of response the comments received do represent a wide spectrum of opinion and portray the opposing views likely to be held by the external examiners when the system goes live.

The template

5. A separate section for comments on learning, teaching and assessment strategies was suggested and considered helpful as the majority of the content of the reports is summarised under "overview and comments/recommendations". Otherwise the template is reasonable.

6. There are two key issues/responses on whether the external examiner would have produced an entry the same as that produced from their report on their behalf.

  a. "It would be different. There were four key recommendations arising from my report (namely related to practice based assessment and preparation of clinical assessors; the need for increased emphasis on learning in practice and the enhancement of the link tutors role; the need to review mechanisms for preparation of examination papers; and the variable quality of audio-recordings sent for external scrutiny and lack of technical support for this facility). None of these suggested areas for improvement appeared in the overview and only two (practice based assessment and the link tutors role) appeared in the electronic version of the 'full report'. This is particularly an area of concern since the quality of audio-recording has been an ongoing issue, and this suggests that areas for improvement could be lost through the publication of summaries."

  b. "The report published is a composite, with passages taken from the reports of the various individual external examiners. I recognise sections that I wrote originally but there is much other material which I assume came from the other externals. Also, my report contained a lengthy section on assessment, with several important reservations. Very little of this appears in the published version. I believe the compiler made an honest attempt at summary. However, my version would have been noticeably different (probably longer, mentioning more strengths and perhaps more weaknesses). Emphatically, **the published report is not 'mine' in any real sense**."

7. Accordingly, from these two responses alone, it seems that, for them to feel happy, it is important that the external examiners fill in the template themselves, or at least provide an imprimatur. This would also clarify the issue of ownership. Other responses were largely happy with the summary but did feel that perhaps they would have stressed points differently and used different language.

8. However, when asked directly if they feel the external examiners should be filling in the report themselves, opinion was divided. Three were adamant that only an external

can effectively summarise the points made and therefore should be filling in the template on the full system despite the extra workload that this would create. It was suggested that some standardisation of fee be considered in respect to the extra workload. The other two felt that what was required was a composite report, as if from a chief external examiner, in which case they were keen to avoid the extra work.

Publishing

9. Opinion was divided over having one's name published with the report. Whilst most preferred to have ownership, as it is part of open accountability, the remaining one was very reluctant to be named, or indeed take part in any exercise involving the acceptance of any responsibility. There were strong concerns from all involved that publication would affect style and content in terms of critical appraisal, constructive comments and the level of frankness being diminished, in addition to presenting an obligation to omit the names of particular staff and probably details which identify specific modules. It was suggested that there must be another section where confidential points, for instance about individual students and staff where there are data protection considerations, can be made.

10. The desire for control over the published summaries was spread across the spectrum. It ranged from full responsibility and control being retained by the external examiner to simply wanting the ability to ensure there was no misquotation or misrepresentation and having the opportunity to comment on drafts to ensure they were balanced and fair.

11. When asked how they would see something being produced that was fair, reflected their views and avoided conflicts with the institution/public, the external examiners' responses indicated that this was an area in need of consideration. Their comments were as follows:

a. "In view of the above, I am fearful that publication of reports will diminish their value to institutions, however the increased workload should examiners be required to produce separate reports is also an area of concern. In addition, if reports for publication are 'diluted', their value within the public domain will be questionable. I believe HEFCE should re-consider the decision to publish summaries and adopt a UK-wide approach, particularly as external examiners' reports will remain a key element of external audit mechanisms."

b. "As an aspiration, this is fine. However, the main difficulty would be in trying to avoid conflict with the institution. It is essential that external examiners are able to make frank criticisms if they think they are warranted. I would not be content if an institution censored my remarks in an attempt to promote an overly rosy impression."

c. "I like the procedure that was outlined where the summary is agreed with me – if that cannot happen then nothing is reported. I am very happy for the institution to say what they did in response to my report as they already so do through formal procedures."

Other issues

12. It was clear from those participating that training is essential for those producing the summaries whether it be the external examiners themselves or those producing on their behalf. Some more examples and an explanation of what is being looked for in addition to the sort of language to be used "as quite a bit of the job is technical and therefore difficult to explain to a general readership." It was also felt that those doing the drafting would need "strong and effective protection from institutions for the occasions when (not if) reports criticise those institutions."

13. Availability of the report to the QAA was no cause of concern.

14. Other comments were as follows:

    a. "As an external examiner, I wish to avoid being drawn further into a bureaucratic process, especially if it is poorly paid. Like most externals, my expertise is in learning and teaching, and I do the job mainly to help another institution, knowing that someone else is helping my own in a similar way. The financial rewards are pitiful, so I really do not do it for the money. We have a mutually organised public service, which trades on goodwill. External examiners are hard to find. Please don't do anything further to drive them away!"

    b. "I have appreciated the opportunity to participate in this pilot study. The omission of key recommendations from my report reflects the difficulty HEIs will encounter in producing these summaries."

    c. "The reports were very easy to access and user-friendly. I am very happy with the content that has been included and it is a fair representation of my findings."

    d. "I look forward to seeing the system in action. It makes it more likely that they will listen to me!"

Annex G: Instructions and documentation

Introduction

1. This annex contains the documentation of the processes involved in the implementation of the pilot project from both back and front end perspectives. The instructions and commentary on inputting data onto the prototype is the actual document distributed amongst the pilot institutions. It includes the formatting restrictions in place when transferring the reports and reviews from MS Word. Some feedback from the pilot HEIs is included but this is detailed more fully in Annex D.

2. For the front end (stakeholder) users a document that represented a considerable simplification on reality was required, and provided after test. The TQI instruction and documentation paper below outlines the various search options available to users and provides explanation of the HE bodies involved. Front end software issues are outlined in Annex C.

Back end (HEI inputting)

Instructions and commentary on inputting data onto the prototype

1. The HERO admin screens can be found at the following web address:

http://212.74.14.9/hero_tqi/admin

User name: HERO_TQI
Password: aH476jkU3

2. Please note that this is a shared password system so is operating on trust. Therefore, on entry please select your own institution from the drop down list on the Welcome screen, with the exception of the examples under Poppleton which are fictitious and there as an example of what it should look like.

3. The majority of the user interface is self-explanatory with regard to the inputting of the data on the condition that the external examiners have adhered to the templates provided. The fields match those of the templates so theoretically all that is required is the simple copying of the relevant information and then the pasting of it to the corresponding field on the system.

4. The Welcome screen is the point of entry into the relevant institution. For the purpose of these instructions the case study of Poppleton will be used as the example.

Step 1 is to select Poppleton from the drop down list and then press ‘go.’ The institution’s name appears at the top of the screen followed by the 4 sets of reports at the institutional level i.e.

- Summary of learning and teaching strategy
- Institutional commentary on findings of external reports
- Overall institutions reviews
- Summary of how institution identifies employer needs and trends.

To create a new report hit create and copy and paste the data from the reports in Word into the relevant fields. Or to modify an existing report hit edit. Once all data has been entered hit update and the information will be stored.

Entering examiners’ reports

5. The external examiners’ reports are not listed with the learning and teaching strategy, the institutional commentary and so forth as they are at institutional level whereas the external examiner’s reports are at subject level and the database works on a hierarchical concept. To reach the examiner’s reports scroll down to subject level, select the subject from the drop down list and hit ‘add.’ The option ‘select report’ should then be available. Hit ‘select report’ which takes you to the HESA and HEFCE data option page where you will be able to view quantitative data (this is not available on the pilot).

At the bottom of the page there is the option to create reports for the periodic reviews and the external examiner's reports.

6. You will see that for Poppleton a periodic review and an examiner's report have been filled in as examples (entirely fictitious). On entering the data for the external examiner's report there were a couple of faults, which will need to be amended for the final system:

- When entering multiple code references separate each code with a comma but no space. For example: Y100,Y120,Y210. If a space is added between codes the following error message will come up when trying to 'update' the report: "Subject reference should start with 1 alphabet and 3 numeric values (e.g. "C101")." This gives the impression that multiple codes cannot be added which of course they can. For the real system this will be amended with either the ability to have a space between each code or with a message informing you how to input more than one code.
- There is an extra data field for the report. The field entitled 'comparability statement' is actually the same as 6. For the purpose of the pilot please just type in anything as every field is mandatory. This field will be removed on the real system.
- It has been recommended that the fields on the system be numbered to match those of the template in order to make matching the corresponding section on the template with the field on the system clearer.

7. The simple process for the copying and pasting of the information is as follows:

a. Have the examiner's report and the inputting screen open and minimised
b. Highlight the material for the section
c. Right click on mouse and select copy
d. Maximise the interface screen
e. Right click in the appropriate field in the position the material is to be placed, and select paste.

It is estimated that the copying and pasting of the text from the examiner's reports and the periodic reviews onto the system will take between 2 and 5 minutes per report depending on the amount of 'tidying up' required as things do have a tendency to move occasionally, for example, the first bullet of a list may indent more than the rest so a quick realignment/deleting of a few tabs may be required. This only happened once during the testing. There is no alteration of content whatsoever.

8. The information will be transferred directly across as with any cut and paste functionality but with the following exceptions:

- Underlining is lost.
- Boldness is lost.
- Font is automatically converted into New Times Roman.
- Font size is automatically converted into the standard for the site.
- Colour is lost.
- Italic is lost.

- Tables cannot be transferred across – the data within the table copies accurately and in the same positioning as if in the table but the grid marks of the table are not visible.
- Pictures or charts are not transferable.
- Capital letters are transferred.
- Alignment is automatically converted to Left i.e. Right align, Centre align and justify are lost.
- Tabbed indentation is transferred.
- Bullet points are converted as follows:
  - • - tiny bullet
  - o - stays the same
  - ▪ - §
  - ❑ - q
  - ❖ - v
  - ➢ - Ø
  - ✓ - ü
- Numbered bullets transfer across accurately and are converted in the same way as the text i.e. font and font size. If bullets are required then numbered bullets are recommended. Alternatively the second bullet in the above list, which also transfers accurately.
- The spacing between the bullet and the text is increased.

9. There are no formatting functionalities available on the site so all text will be converted to conform to the site design. Once the information is on the system there are no tools for spell checking, or any editorial functionalities so all this must be done in Word before it is transferred.

10. Once all the relevant data has been copied across to the system, click on 'update' and the information will be saved. The option to return back to institutional level will then appear and will take you back to the other reviews and data options.

<u>HEI inputting issues and suggestions</u>

a. The institutions struggled with adhering to field length restrictions for the examiners' reports and the learning and teaching strategy summaries. For the pilot these were extended by EPIC according to requests from Cambridge, Liverpool and De Montfort.
b. The field character limit should be stated clearly above each field.
c. If the text entered is over the limit the error message should indicate which field needs amending.
d. There is a field missing from the pilot site which is present on the template.
e. There is an extra field on the site entitled 'comparability statement' for the external examiners' report. This needs to be removed for implementation.
f. The character count includes html mark-up.

g. The red error message should occur at the bottom of the page in full view so the person responsible for the data entry is guaranteed to see it. This will avoid data being lost due to not being saved properly.
h. There is an issue with entering codes for joint honours.
i. The field on the external examiners' report template for the external examiner's period of employment only has a drop down list for 'up until' rather than start and end date drop down lists. This needs amending as most examiner's will wish to enter here the date at which their employment started and that at which it ended, which is what the system is asking, for example, October 1998 – November 2003.
j. More detail regarding the 6 pilot HEIs' experience is featured in Annex D.

Front end (Stakeholder viewing)

TQI Front end Documentation and Instruction

Introduction

1. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are monitored in terms of quality by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). QAA representatives visit the institutions over an agreed period to watch, evaluate and analyse the institution's performance. Over time this has become less and less convenient. The HERO project aims to remove the physical presence of the QAA in HEIs and replace it with an Internet site whereby appropriate institutional reviews and reports will be published.

2. HERO stands for Higher Education and Research Opportunities in the United Kingdom and has been created to be:

- "The primary internet portal for academic research and higher education in the UK,
- the natural entry point for enquiries about higher education in the UK for the widest possible range of customers
- a showcase for the diversity and quality of research and higher education in the UK." (HERO website, 04/03).

It is divided into 6 'zones':

i. Studying.
This includes guidance on choosing a course, why study? Funding issues and the process of applying.

ii. Research.
This zone provides information relevant to academic research and research training in the UK. This includes academic research problems, organisation, funding, training and careers, experts, and ethics. The focus is on academic research activities supported by and being carried out by HEIs and the research councils.

iii. Business.
This zone details how businesses can work with HE for successful graduate recruitment.

iv. Inside HE.
This zone is for staff information on employment, training and working practice.

v. Culture and Sport.
Social activities are an important part of higher education, whether you're a student, researcher or staff member, a conference visitor, or even if you just live near a college or university. This zone will develop into a place where you'll be able to find information and links on ways to enjoy yourself in your free time – all provided by higher education institutions.

vi. Universities and Colleges.
This zone provides information on the institutions that offer Higher Education (HE) courses.

3. HERO currently provides general and specific information on all the HEIs (Higher Education Institutions) in the UK. This includes the academic structure, departments and faculties, accommodation and conference facilities, information on the city or location of the institution for example pubs, museums etc, and learning resources and so on. There is another set of information about institutions which, up until now, has not been published. This includes real information on institutional strategy, reports on departmental performance, statistics on student performance, and destinations after graduation, and the reports from the external examiners who analyse and evaluate an institution's performance and standards on departmental level and at subject area and course level. This information is what will be available on the new site so that the potential student, potential graduate employer, or college careers officer can search for particular institutions and courses, view the reports and statistics and make comparisons and judgements on standards and suitability based on real data.

<u>Front-end instructions and documentation</u>

4. To gain access to the site at this pilot stage the following access code, user name and password is required:

http://212.74.14.9/hero_tqi/
User name: HERO_TQI
Password: aH476jkU3

5. There are three search pathways available on the Welcome page which will ultimately lead to the reviews at institutional level and thereafter the reports at subject and course level:

i. Search for a specific institution
ii. Search by subject area
iii. Specific search functionality whereby a keyword is entered into the search engine.

Search option 1 – Searching for a specific institution

6. Once this option has been selected from HERO's welcome page the user will be presented with a regional map of the UK.

- Select a region from either the map itself, which is dynamic, or the list of regions on the left of the screen.
- Once the region has been selected the site zooms in on that region and illustrates the location of all the HEIs in that region. This map is also dynamic which gives the user the choice of clicking directly on the institution of interest on the map or using the list of institutions in the region on the left side of the screen.

- If the HEI being sought is not on the list then the user can click on the map of the UK on the top right of the screen to go back and select another region. The regions are also listed above the institution list on the left.
- Once the user has found the institution in question and has selected it (s)he is presented with the institution level reviews and reports.
- The institutional reviews are listed at the top of the page. Each is an active bookmark which will take the user directly to the part of the page where the review of interest is situated.
- The route that the user has taken is listed across the top of the screen. Each item is an active link so the user can jump straight back to a particular stage in their search.
- The user can go straight to the institutional level reviews for another institution in the region by using the list of institutions in the region on the left side of the screen. To switch to another region is the same as at any other stage – either use the maps on the top right corner of the screen or use the lists on the left.

Institutional level reviews

Summary of learning and teaching strategy

7. Each institution has a learning and teaching strategy which it submits to HEFCE. It is somewhat formal and they often have a lot in common, however, there can be subtle differences. It outlines what their next actions are at an institutional level.

Institutional commentary on the findings of external examiners' reports

8. The institution may wish to pull out of the external examiners' reports some generic issues or widespread issues such as the problems of engineering subjects to not require A-level maths or physics. Other items that might appear are major timing changes or procedural changes such as modularisation or semesterisation, which clearly lead to common issues. This field is not compulsory.

Summary of the institution identifies employer needs and trends

9. This field gives an institutional overview of how the world of work is involved in such areas as course design, course delivery and course revision. Sandwich opportunities and links with specific industries or government should appear here.

- After the institutional level reviews there is the option of **Subject areas offered**. To view the subject level reports, which include the external examiners' reports, select the subject area of interest and click on 'view reports.'
- Again, the layout of the page is such that the user can either select the relevant review/report from the shortcut list, which leads straight to the section of the page where the report is displayed, or the user can scroll down the page manually.

Subject level reviews

Statistical data

10. Here the user is presented with the following quantitative data sets to choose from:
    1. HESA data on entry
    2. HESA data on class of degree
    3. HEFCE data on progression 1st to 2nd year
    4. HEFCE data on progression all years
    5. HEFCE data on first destination.

The data is provided by HEFCE and HESA.

HEFCE

11. "*The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) distributes public money for teaching and research to universities and colleges. In doing so, it aims to promote high quality education and research, within a financially healthy sector. The Council also plays a key role in ensuring accountability and promoting good practice*." (HEFCE website, 04/03).

12. HEFCE has provided the statistics on student progression and the first destination of the students for each institution and at a finer level of granularity for each subject area within the institutions on the site. For further information on HEFCE's role in the Higher Education community and its aim and strategies, see the website: **www.hefce.ac.uk**

HESA

13. "HESA is now the central source for higher education statistics and has standardised and streamlined the data collection and publication process to become a respected point of reference." (HESA website, 04/03).

14. The Student Record contains over 150 pieces of information for each student currently studying a course that leads to a qualification or credit, at a higher education institution. The data contains information on the subject of study chosen, entry qualification and student characteristics. There is also a First Destinations Supplement to this record detailing the destination of students after graduation, for example the kind of employment pursued.

15. From the data collected from the student records HESA can provide information on any institution in terms of student performance and characteristics. For this project HESA is providing statistics on the qualification levels that had to be achieved by students wanting to get on a course in the institutions and subject areas on the site, and the class of degree obtained by each cohort at the end of their studies. Consequently the success of a course in terms of student performance in one institution can be measured and be compared to that of another institution by the data that HESA can provide.

16. For further information on HESA, see the website: **www.hesa.ac.uk**

- HESA data on entry.

See UCAS and tariff points system to explain.

- HESA data on class of degree.

This data set is largely self-explanatory (although it may be more easily interpreted if presented in another way, for example a pie chart or bar graph).

- HEFCE data on progression 1st to 2nd year.

- HEFCE data on progression all years.

- HEFCE data on first destination.

Summaries of departmental reviews

17. From time to time institutions or external bodies review departments or courses and write lengthy reports. This is a healthy developmental process. Typically this happens every 7 years. Only reports that are relatively recent are presented and so the time series is not meaningful. Typically these reports set direction, perhaps set major reviews of courses, suggest new progress or discontinuities. A lot can be learnt from this but again the language can be codified and opaque at times.

Summaries of external examiners' reports

18. In the UK, unlike many other countries, senior people from other universities are involved in the processes that lead to the award of qualifications. External examiners write reports on their findings, any good points, problems and so on. They also state whether the standards achieved by the students are "in line" with comparable institutions and whether the assessment methods are appropriate for the material studied – for instance a suitable mix of project work, coursework and examinations. The UK sets great store by this system and these reports are at the heart of the quality assurance process.

19. Summaries of the external examiners' reports for the courses within the selected subject area are provided. If there is a specific course being searched for then the user has to scroll down through the reports manually to find the report for the course in question. A brief overview for each report is presented but sometimes there is the option for the user to read a fuller summary.

20. At this stage there is the option to print the whole profile which, if selected, takes the user to a printer friendly document whereby all the institutional level reviews and subject level reviews and reports are contained. Note that the statistics are not included in this printable profile. Alternatively, the user can print out just one page at any point during his/her search. However, there is no printer option on the statistics page.

Search Option 2 – search by subject area

21. To follow this pathway the user needs to select a subject area from the drop down list which contains the nineteen subject areas and their code.

22. Once the subject area has been selected, the user is presented with a list of institutions that offer courses in that subject area. The user has the option to filter this list by region.

23. Upon selecting an institution the user is taken to the subject level reports and reviews which consist of the statistical data, the departmental reviews and the external examiner reports, all previously described and explained in this document. If the user wishes to look further into the university/institution as a whole (s)he can use the option to go back to institutional level reviews where (s)he will find the institutional commentary on the external examiner reports, the learning and teaching strategy summary, and the report on how the institution identifies the needs and trends of employers.

Search Option 3 – Search by subject/Keyword

24. To use the example of accounting, which is the subject currently in the search box on the prototype, once selected the user is presented with a list of all the accounting courses/courses which feature accounting in some way from all the institutions that provide it. Each has the first 4-5 lines of the external examiner's summary. Once the user has found the course they were searching for from an institution of interest (s)he can select "view report" to view the summary of the course in full. The options are then as described previously i.e. there is the option to go to the subject area reports and once viewing these there is the option to go back to the institutional level reports. The structure is the same whichever search path the user selects.

25. The advantage of using search option 3 is that it takes the user directly to the external examiner reports for a specific course and then subsequently a specific institution.

26. It is important that the users understand and remember the structure of the layout of the site in terms of the reports and reviews when using the different search options, as they do not always follow the hierarchical order i.e. institutional level and subject area level. Option 3 bypasses the institutional level reports and takes the user straight to subject level. There is the option to go "back to institutional level reviews" which can create confusion as using this search avenue the user has not yet been through the institutional level page. Perhaps "To institutional level reviews" would be more straightforward phraseology.

27. The user can then browse between the various reviews as described previously as the look and feel and structure of the site is consistent throughout.

28. Front end issues and commentary can be found in detail in Annex C.

Annex H: Costs

Introduction

1. Costs have been estimated under five headings:
- Cost of the pilot
- Set-up cost of system – institutional
- Set-up cost of system – central
- Recurrent cost of system – institutional
- Recurrent cost of system – central.

2. This appendix supplements the figures in the text and gives some breakdown of what components were included.

3. All costs are approximate and exclude VAT. They also exclude indirect overhead costs. In order to arrive at the figures and the extrapolation, it is necessary to unpack not only the figures and tables provided by those taking part, but also the text that qualifies and surrounds the data. All costs are rounded to the nearest thousand pounds.

4. Some data are clear and in line between institutions. Others show considerable variation on what might naively have been expected with a small parameter model. This is explored further in each section to produce an overall extrapolation. As a corollary the figures have to be treated with some caution. However, variation by a factor of 0.5 to 2 at individual institutions does not invalidate the overall results of the report – that there is a considerable saving and that the actual cost will depend on the procedures adopted by institutions. These are a matter of choice.

Pilot costs

5. The budget for the pilot was £110K. This was originally established as:

Payments to institutions	£30K
HERO costs including project officer	£23K
Software production and consultancy costs	£47K
Market research costs	£10K

6. In the event there was some modest virement between budgets, with for instance the market research costs going up marginally and the software costs coming down.

7. Each participating institution was sent a cheque for £5K on production of their final report. They were asked to cost their involvement in the pilot as part of that report. Of the six, one was somewhat lower than £5K; three were close to it; and two somewhat higher. Overall the total was £40K rather than £30K but some of this reflects expenditure that will not have to be repeated when the full system is introduced. Accordingly, the budget setting was essentially accurate.

Institutional set-up costs

8. Approximate costs estimated were as follows. Here some central choices have been made in ranges but it must be remembered that this is a very imprecise calculation with accuracy of say a binary order of magnitude. Because of this accuracy, argument is presented in a form that fits it. Finely honed statistical arguments are inappropriate and have been replaced by crude pro rata calculations based on a small number of parameters.

Cambridge	£60K
DMU	£55K
KIAD	£45K
Liverpool	£15K
Open	£18K
UNN	£35K

9. This data is not completely lined up at this stage. The Open University benefits from a structure that makes the task easy. It has very significant numbers and if included at full weight will potentially distort the overall cost downwards to reflect its enhanced state of readiness. Liverpool is intending to change procedures less than most and their estimate is based on an extrapolation of the procedure used in the pilot of administrative summaries. If replicated across the system these two would lead to an overall cost of £1.5-3M.

10. The other four sites propose changing procedures to allow externals to be at the heart of the summarising process. The amount of work to be done in advance of that is determined by how radical their proposed changes are. There is also an element of fixed cost – there is a cost in changing procedures that is incurred no matter how small the institution. Allowing for this and relative sizes, they are broadly in line and extrapolate to a figure for the sector of about £6M. Extrapolating from the worst case gives close to £10M. This represents a considerable improvement in practice however, which is not required as part of TQI.

11. A deduction, allowing for the English mix of sites, closeness of fit etc has thus been made at £4-7M. This rejects both extremes and is sufficiently accurate with reasonable probability for our purpose.

Central set-up costs

12. This cost has been estimated for the 15-month period to go live in summer 2004 as £235K. Again VAT is excluded and the costing is at current prices.

Items involved are:

- Software development and consultancy £127K
- Hardware acquisition and deployment £28K
- Support of stakeholders and institutions £32K
- Development of training and documentation £27K
- Representation at events etc £21K

13. As with the original budget, there will need to be some virement as the precise software cost will be negotiated alongside the specification. The system developed will have to be fully specified, responsive to stakeholder needs, tested by stakeholders, robust to browsers, with better facilities for access, and allow the building up of a large dataset over time. Initial new hardware will mainly be filestore.

14. Not all development will be of the HERO site. Tools to allow summarisers and others to interact with the site effectively will be required. Training ware will be developed alongside for these tools and the main site. It is likely that an extensive programme of explanation and travel will be undertaken.

Institutional recurrent costs

15. Costs were estimated as follows:

Cambridge	£65K
DMU	£55K
KIAD	£45K
Liverpool	£45K
Open	£18K
UNN	£175K

16. To extrapolate from this data is a difficult activity unless the text of the reports and knowledge of the sites is also analysed and some decisions made about preferred or suggested actions. Thus the cost will depend on decisions taken.

17. Cambridge has costed a procedure with externals taking responsibility. They point out that the templates and structure are a poor fit for their procedures and something that offered better support for a Tripos system would be preferable. Overall they do not perceive much value added from involvement. They will in part have summarising examiners from amongst fairly large teams.

18. DMU has groups of externals for clumps of modules and do not always bring things together at a programme level although they have instances where they do. They tried two different methods of summarising. One was based on groups and the other on programmes. They are keen to unravel their actual structures and put in place roles for externals that will work with this and other regimes. The costs are partially payments to externals and partially more internal resource. They are anticipating a better process resulting.

19. KIAD propose a rigorous procedure involving external examiners writing summaries but carefully managed. They believe that this leads to the need to employ someone full time because of the skill set required. They also believe that better quality will result.

20. Liverpool is not intending to change external examiner procedures significantly. The work for them is for central summarisers to be provided and this sizing is based on the load for the part that they have done, and internal action. They do not see it as a big job.

21. The Open University already has in place a structure with individuals taking an overarching role for named programmes whilst having module based externals whose reports will not generally be summarised. They are conscious of the need to record quality information. Accordingly, it is a small load and fits in to the existing duties well, the extra funds being used to pay some externals more and have training in place. They have clear contracts for externals and so the process is one of changing the contract and the amount.

22. UNN has costed the scenario in which every external examiner writes a summary and then there is a fairly extensive operation checking and negotiating. Their initial estimate is that this will require five extra administrative posts and this is the main item of cost.

23. Against all of this cost has to be put the relative lack of interest from many stakeholders in the detail of the external summaries. As this is the bulk of the sectoral cost, it is worth institutions and the sector seeing whether it can be simplified as a process. It is also the process that is likely to cause the biggest ongoing problem as there are political issues: many HE authors lack the skills and training to author for the intended audience. It might be possible to outsource a third party but the experience of externals is that, whilst they are not all happy to summarise, they are less happy for others to do so on their behalf.

24. Partially to help with this, the template has been revised (Annex I). Brevity is encouraged – there is no need for the summary to be other than that. Some information should however be conveyed but the concentration should be on the issues that concern the stakeholders rather than those of internal detailed process.

25. Stakeholders seem largely interested in information that is about programmes or groups of programmes rather than modules. They were keen to see responses to criticism over time. A possibility being considered by some is to use overview externals for such programmes or groups of programmes. Fewer summaries are written but they bring together more – perhaps one for each area in the eventual granularity decided on – say all programmes involving physics. One of a group of externals, perhaps the most senior, brings together the reports of a set and produces the summary. This will reduce the work and hence the costs by a substantial factor without significantly disadvantaging most stakeholders. There will need to be guidelines.

26. With these considerations in mind, it is possible to revisit the costing data. With an OU style organisation the total cost will be lower than £2M pa. With a DMU style (KIAD is roughly in line) it could as high as £20M pa. Looking at the others, which are broadly in line, a central range of £5M- £8M emerges. This seems to reflect the thinking of the sites in discussion. It seems that to do better than this may take some time for the system to work through but with fewer and simpler summaries, it should be straightforward to effect say a 50 % reduction in cost with a sum of say £4M a suitable target within a few years.

Central recurrent costs

27. This cost has been estimated at £117K pa. Again VAT is excluded and the costing is at current prices.
Elements involved are:

- Hardware and software maintenance £33K
- Ongoing routine extensions to the system £20K
- Institution and sector support £25K
- Stakeholder support and representation £24K
- Development of tools, training and documentation £15K

28. As before, there will need to be some virement. Maintenance costs vary with industry standards and the value of the base. Maintenance will be negotiated alongside the specification.

29. There will be a need to have support staff at Newcastle to support users in HEIs and stakeholder organisations. An appropriate website with frequently asked questions etc will be developed to minimise this cost.

30. Tools for externals will develop over time and other tools will be needed. Some may relate to integration of national survey data. Training ware will need to be routinely updated and improved.