Universities UK

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Framework for programme reviews

Ensuring the value of university courses

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Foreword by Professor Julia Buckingham CBE

Universities in the UK have a strong track record in delivering high-quality courses. However, we need to address concerns that some courses offer poor quality or value.

In this challenging economic environment, students, government, and taxpayers are right to question and ask for assurance on the quality and value of courses.

However, there's a real risk that regulation and funding decisions based only on narrow measures, such as graduate outcomes, will make it more difficult for universities to support levelling up, improve social mobility and deliver choice for students.

We need a different narrative around quality and value. A shared understanding of what quality and value means is essential to ensure we're all working towards the same goal. We need an approach that is flexible so we can meet the needs of students, employers, and local and national economies, and that is adaptable to future changes, including the shift toward lifelong learning.

Universities UK (UUK) has worked extensively with its members and stakeholders over the last year to develop this good practice framework for programme review processes in universities in England.

It will support universities' internal processes, ensuring they can identify courses where value or quality might be an issue and act on it, build public and government confidence in the quality and value of our provision, and demonstrate the sector's commitment to consistency and transparency in this area.

I would like to thank everyone who gave their time and expertise in supporting the development of this framework.

It's time for universities to take the initiative to improve consistency and transparency in their approaches, and to be ambitious in their efforts.

Professor Julia Buckingham CBE chaired the advisory group leading the work and is currently Chair of the Institute of Cancer Research.

Introduction

The risk of regulation

The OfS has set out its aim to tackle courses deemed 'low quality', through principles-based conditions of registration covering course content, academic support, and assessment. However, they're also proposing requirements for graduate outcomes, with a focus on progression to professional employment or postgraduate study – placing a disproportionate focus on these measures.

The government's plan for growth sets out priorities for the UK's economic recovery, including a focus on levelling up and improving life chances across local areas, addressing the skills gap, and encouraging innovation in businesses.

Universities must address perceptions of low-quality courses. However, there is a risk that regulation and funding decisions based only on narrow graduate outcome measures will harm courses that support levelling up, improve social mobility and deliver student choice.

What do students think?

Employment outcomes are important to students, with 53% indicating that they decided to go to university to 'get on the career ladder'.

However, we know that students and graduates have a wider understanding of the value and quality of their courses. To students, the most important factors in demonstrating value are quality of teaching (94%) and fair assessment and feedback (91%), followed by 'securing a job shortly after graduation' (65%).

Eight of 10 students and recent graduates also agree that the government should do more to advocate for the broader benefits of university study.

How are quality and value checked?

Regulators and funders monitor the ability of providers to meet quality measures around course design, and a robust quality assurance system is in place to protect standards.

Beyond this, all universities look carefully at the performance of their courses through internal processes. As autonomous organisations, universities decide how they do this. The range of approaches reflects the diversity of students and different universities' goals. However, there is an opportunity for the sector to improve transparency and consistency of these internal programme review processes. Within our framework, we define 'programmes' as a course or set of courses which form a unit that can be subject to meaningful review.

Our framework for programme review processes in England will ensure that courses provide good value and outcomes for students, while meeting the changing needs of employers and the economy.

Developing a framework for programme reviews in England

Quality vs value

’Quality’ and ‘value’ are often used interchangeably, but reflect very different aspects of higher education.

Quality

Quality is objective and looks at how courses are delivered, based on shared standards for what a good course looks like, such as those historically set out in the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)’s UK Quality Code for Higher Education, and expressed in the OfS conditions of registration.

This includes measures over which universities have direct control, such as student course content and design, outcomes from external reviews, and support and facilities provided to students while they study.

Value

Value is harder to define. Perceptions of value will change depending on who is making the assessment, whether they are students, graduates, employers, taxpayers or the government.

These measures are broader and often not in the direct control of universities, but are driven by other factors. Different measures include:

- the likeliness of graduates entering high-skilled employment,
- a person’s life satisfaction five years after graduating
- impact on the productivity of businesses
- positive civic and community engagement of graduates

What are universities in England currently doing?

The processes universities use to review their own courses vary across England, reflecting the diversity of their goals. In developing the framework, we considered evidence on current practice, which shows:

- **Differences in university practices are the result of universities viewing the purpose of reviews differently.** This includes, but is not limited to, monitoring quality of teaching, ensuring financial sustainability, finding opportunities for growth, and developing courses.[1]
- **Reviews mostly occur on an annual basis,** with a third of institutions having more extensive reviews every few years, and the same proportion using ongoing monitoring processes.
- **Governance of processes is varied,** including how decentralised roles and responsibilities are to faculties, schools, and departments.
- **Most universities use an array of metrics (standard measures of value and quality)** in monitoring course performance. For example:
  - Metrics related to student recruitment, such as the number of students, were referenced explicitly by almost all institutions we surveyed.[2]
  - Student voice was also used extensively (eg National Student Survey data and modular feedback).
  - Historically, graduate outcomes (employment and further study) have been used by just over half of institutions, with feedback from our pilots suggesting that this has improved markedly in recent years.
- **Criteria used to consider closing courses** include trends in applicant numbers (85% of higher education institutions), actual recruitment against targets (74%), costs of delivery against income (65%) and student satisfaction (41%).
- **It's common for action plans to be developed,** which are used to make enhancements in areas identified for improvement.

[1] Based on information gathered from selected UUK member institutions in 2019
[2] Based on information gathered from selected UUK member institutions in 2019

Course closures often have formal processes for assessment and sign-off and can involve significant financial costs to institutions. However, it's not always clear how courses are flagged for change through review processes.

This current practice suggests there is an opportunity for universities to learn from each other and best practice in review processes in tackling 'low value' and 'low quality' provision.

How this framework was developed

To produce this framework, we:

1. **Set up an advisory group of vice-chancellors** (see Annexe 1) to inform and steer the work, chaired by. Professor Julia Buckingham CBE.

2. **Engaged and consulted with our members** through a series of roundtables in summer 2021.

   – 66 representatives from our member institutions in England attended the sessions, and separate discussions were held with universities in the devolved nations.

   – Feedback from the sessions showed wide support for further work on the use of metrics in defining quality and value, including challenging the misuse of metrics and how this drives and shapes questions of value.

3. **Held a workshop** with members of the Association of Heads of University Administration (AHUA) and the Higher Education Strategic Planners Association (HESPA) to test the detail of the guidance.

4. **Consulted with stakeholders** on their views and evidence on the value and quality of courses, and considered evidence on student views, as well as those from business, higher education and third sector organisations. They include the CBI, National Centre for Universities and Businesses, Institute of Student Employers, the LEP Network and the Creative Industries Federation.

5. **Carried out a pilot with a broad mix of institutions** (see page 19) to understand how universities can put the framework in place, identify barriers and factors that would help with putting the framework in place, and gather evidence on how the framework adds value to existing processes.

Scope of this framework

This framework is:

- **Focused on England,** but considers UK-wide implications. Its development involved engagement with institutions across the UK.

- **Clearly focused on, and limited to, enhancing institutional processes** by identifying and sharing best practice.

- **Focused initially on full-time undergraduate courses for UK domiciled students,** recognising the better understanding of measures and outcomes of these students.

- **Complementing, and not replacing, existing quality assurance processes in England,** primarily the UK Quality Code for Higher Education and Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) requirements.

Aims

The framework will:

- **Support our members in England in their programme review processes,** with a focus on the delivery of high-value and high-quality sustainable courses.

- **Demonstrate the sector's commitment to consistency and transparency** in programme review processes and give confidence that the sector is regulating itself in this area.

- **Set out an approach where universities in England can integrate metrics** including graduate outcomes and wider measures of value into reviews of courses, while maximising contributions to levelling up, improving social mobility, and meeting the needs of students, employers, and local areas.

- **Provide a tool to enable a shared understanding of what is meant by low quality and low value courses**, which is meaningful to stakeholders – including students, universities, employers, government, and the general public.

Framework for programme reviews in England

We've developed this tool to enable a shared understanding of what is meant by low value and low-quality programmes that is meaningful to stakeholders including students, universities, employers, government, and the general public.

It provides a robust approach to identifying and remedying any programmes which fall short of expectation, through enhancement, restructuring and, where applicable, closure of a course.

We hope this guidance, and our continuing support, will help universities in England to:

- identify which metrics of 'value' are important
- apply metrics efficiently and fairly to decision-making
- communicate clearly to students and staff the rationale behind monitoring, the processes involved, and the actions and planning decisions taken to address concerns

Metrics

The use of metrics in the framework is principled, flexible where appropriate, and sensitive to both the limits of quantitative approaches and the importance of wider contextual information.

Metrics play an important role in helping universities and students understand the range of factors that contribute to evaluating a course's quality and value. They are valuable tools that help support the decision-making processes.

However, metrics cannot replace other parts of the decision-making process, including use of qualitative and other contextual information. Metrics can only ever be a part of the picture, and processes should recognise that no single measure or set of measures can be used without some level of error being involved.

Universities will rightly want to consider other measures in assessing courses, including:

- **Financial viability,** eg demand from students, market position, margin of income over costs.

- **Quality,** informed by the principles and advice and guidance that accompanies the UK Quality Code for Higher Education. This includes monitoring measures that are within the direct control of universities during study, such as learning opportunities for students.

- **Standards,** eg assessment, feedback, marking, degree outcomes, grade improvement/inflation.

- **Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) requirements,** eg occupation or employer requirements.

This framework is designed to complement guidance already in place on the monitoring of programmes and identification areas for remedial action, including the UK Quality Code for Higher Education and the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcome Framework.

The format

The framework is made up of three sections that universities in England are being encouraged to integrate into their programme review processes:

- **Section A:** Principles for programme review processes
- **Section B:** Measures for monitoring provision
- **Section C:** Demonstrating the sector's commitment to transparency and consistency

Section A: Principles for programme review processes

These high-level principles are designed to complement and build on frameworks that universities are already using including the UK Quality Code for Higher Education and the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework.

We encourage universities in England to consider the principles outlined below in their internal programme review processes.

Monitoring

1. **Be informed by metrics, rather than led by them**
   Information should be used to flag anomalies or concerns, and the causes should then be investigated.

2. **Consider value equally with other factors**
   The value of courses, including outcomes, should be given equal consideration with other factors related to course viability. Universities should ensure programmes and courses are financially sustainable and adhere to assurance processes linked to quality and standards (eg UK Quality code and PSRB requirements). They should also integrate measures and assessment of the quality and value of provision into their annual programme review processes.

3. **Support and encourage diversity and innovation**
   When designing course review processes, universities should consider how they can encourage diversity and innovation in course design and delivery.

Assessing when action should be taken

4. **Use contextual information**
   Universities should use contextual information to assess when action is needed. Approaches should reflect the wider environment in which students choose a course, including national and local education and employment opportunities, as well as demographic and cultural factors (eg controlling for legitimate regional differences).

5. **Be strategic**
   Universities should build processes for assessments and actions around the strategies and goals of the university or department. They should incentivise positive actions to enhance quality where problems are found. Reflecting best practice in this area, this should involve close consultation with students, and bring in views from employers and schools while developing review processes.

6. **Monitor regularly**
   Universities must undertake monitoring processes on a regular basis, normally annually. This should include monitoring of trends over time to indicate where performance is improving or where there may be ongoing issues with the quality and value of courses.

7. **Act on areas of concern**
   Where there are ongoing concerns about a programme or course, universities should set out a plan for action with defined measurable milestones, including the transformation or restructuring of courses if needed and, where applicable, closure of a course. It is up to universities to determine the action that is taken.

Transparency

8. **Be transparent in your approaches**
   Universities should be transparent about the approaches they take to monitor and assess their provision, including the metrics and assessment criteria they use and the processes for addressing concerns. This should include an explanation of the role of institutional governance structures in reviewing data, identifying courses where action is necessary and monitoring progress against plans for action. Information on processes should be communicated clearly and accessibly to internal and external audiences including students, regulators, and university staff.

Section B: Measures for monitoring provision

This framework encourages all universities to integrate metrics from a selection of measures as part of their programme review processes.

The toolkit builds on our work to develop measures which reflect government research into the benefits of higher education participation for individuals and society and measures already reported through the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework.

This is not a static list, and is expected to evolve as the priorities and needs of students and employers shift, and new data becomes available or is developed by the designated data body for England, the regulator, government, or other stakeholders.

Further technical information is provided in Annexe 2, including sources and definitions for core and contextual measures.

How to use this toolkit

The toolkit is organised into core metrics that are publicly available to all universities in England, often at a programme or subject level. **Universities should integrate at least one or more measures per core theme into their review processes.**

Contextual measures

- We have provided potential contextual measures that demonstrate the value of a course and how this aligns with student needs and key government priority areas, including support for local and national economic growth and social responsibility. Ideally, identifying and using appropriate contextual measures should involve close consultation with students, employers, and schools.

We also recommend:

- **Where data isn't available at the required level of detail,** universities should explore options for appropriate cohort sizes necessary for assessment, such as combining data over years, or grouping subjects at a higher level.
- **Where courses or programmes are flagged through assessment processes,** universities are encouraged to explore capturing additional qualitative or quantitative information to demonstrate how courses provide wider value.

- **An initial focus on courses predominantly made up of UK domiciled full-time undergraduate students.** This is due to the challenges of applying measures to wider ways and levels of study – for example, small sizes of cohorts and lack of available information or defining good outcomes. We will continue to work with institutions and stakeholders to consider how to assess other modes and levels of study.

Core metrics

Theme	Metrics
(1) Student and graduate views	A. **Student satisfaction:** The percentage of students who were satisfied with the teaching, assessment and feedback, and academic support on their course. B. **Meeting student expectations:** Comparison of outcomes compared to expectations gathered from students entering institutions, to reflect diversity of student views.
(2) Student outcomes	C. **Continuation:** The percentage of students who were enrolled at the start of the academic year and progressed to the following year, obtained a qualification, or transferred to another institution. D. **Completion:** The percentage of students who start on a course and are projected to leave with a qualification. E. **Value added – learning gain:** Approaches that compare degree grades with entry grades, ie relative learning gain, or 'value added'.
(3) Graduate prospects	F. **Highly skilled employment:** The percentage of graduates in highly skilled employment or further study after qualifying. G. **Graduate unemployment:** The percentage of graduates who experienced unemployment. H. **Graduate views on career progress:** The percentage of graduates that feel their current work is meaningful, that their current work fits with their future plans or that they are using what they learnt during their studies.

Contextual metrics and measures

Theme	Metrics
(1) Supporting economic growth	I. **Employment in high-growth sector:** The proportion of graduates employed within high growth sectors, particularly in areas of the country with low growth. J. **Employment in innovative sectors:** The proportion of graduates working in high innovation industries and businesses. K. **High skilled employment in low growth areas:** The proportion of graduates who work in 'professional' jobs in low growth regions/areas. L. **Employment or further study in local areas:** The proportion of graduates who work or remain for further study in the local area. M. **Entrepreneurship:** The proportion of graduates who start or own their own business which survives for at least three years.
(2) Social responsibility	N. **Value added - social mobility:** Use of the social mobility index to look at value-added contribution of institutions and courses. O. **Key attainment gaps:** The gap in awards between target groups of students. P. **Progression into public health and social care professions:** The proportion of students progressing into medicine, nursing, midwifery, and allied health and social care professions. Q. **Progression into teaching professions:** The proportion of students progressing into teaching. R. **Contribution to culture:** The likelihood of graduates working within the creative and cultural sector.

	S. **Positive contribution to the green economy:** The proportion of graduates working in industries or roles with a primary function of positive environmental activity.
(3) University mission and strategy	T. **Mission-oriented value:** Measures that show how courses align with the university's mission and strategy. For example, this might include: • links between courses and areas of strategically important research • courses that are critical to the provision of skills to local employers • courses that are linked to widening access relationships with local schools and Further Education colleges

Section C: Demonstrating the sector's commitment to transparency and consistency

It is up to universities to determine how they review courses and programmes. However, we encourage universities to use the principles and approaches we have outlined.

To make sure processes are transparent – and to encourage greater consistency and consideration of best practice **– we're asking our members in England to publish annual statements signed off by university councils, or the appropriate executive body.** Statements should be clear and accessible on university websites by early 2023, and institutions should update these regularly to reflect any changes.

These short statements should follow the style of a brief, high-level summary for the institution rather than each course, covering the following areas:

Content	**Statements should outline:** • how core metrics and contextual information on the value of courses are used in review processes • the method of assessment used in flagging provision and timescales • approaches for acting where there are issues and the processes for institutional oversight **Specific areas to cover include:** **Approaches taken in monitoring courses and programmes**, including how core metrics have been used in programme reviews and how contextual information has been used to consider the value of courses, as set out in this framework. **Assessment criteria used**, including an outline of criteria used in assessing the performance of courses (such as thresholds and comparator groups) and any external input or expertise involved in assessing of courses.

	Institutional governance. Universities should state the role of institutional governance structures (eg senate or academic board) in reviewing data, identifying courses where action is necessary and monitoring progress against plans for action. **Outline of how actions are taken.** Universities should state how actions from reviews are taken to address concerns and improve courses and outcomes for students, how outcomes are monitored at institutional level, and when issues may lead to the university transforming its provision more widely.
Sign off	The statement will be developed under the oversight of the senate or academic board and signed off by the council or appropriate executive body, to indicate the university's commitment to transparency in programme review processes.
Presentation	The statement should be short and high level, using plain English and use accessible, rather than overly technical language.
Publication	The statement should be published online, in a clear way that is accessible to public audiences. It should be reviewed regularly to make sure it stays relevant over time and include updates to reflect changes in circumstances and approaches.

Piloting the framework

To test the feasibility of putting the framework in place, we ran a pilot exercise with a broad mix of universities, focusing on university staff who would be involved in putting the framework in place.

Rather than a full pilot, a proof-of-concept exercise was used to gather feedback. We used a discussion-based approach to collect insights from a broad mix of universities.

The three main objectives of the exercise were to:

1. Understand how the framework can be practically embedded within existing institutional structures and processes.
2. Find the barriers to using the framework and how these might be reduced.
3. Gather evidence on how using the framework would add value to existing processes.

Feedback from the exercise resulted in changes to the structure and content of the framework and will inform our continued support and engagement with universities.

Approach

Semi-structured discussions took place over October and December 2021, with participants engaging in multiple conversations over the period, covering the three sections of the framework (principles, measures, and transparency), as well as general reflections. Shorter discussions were held with universities that could not commit to the full exercise.

We mainly held discussions with senior leaders in planning and quality departments and academic registrars. We're incredibly grateful to the people that volunteered their time and insights to support this project.

While universities volunteered to take part, we made efforts to find views and reach out to a broad mix of universities representing different parts of the sector in terms of selectivity, specialisms, and geography.

We've provided a list of participating universities in Annexe 3.

Key findings

Current practice and ambitions

- All participating universities have regular processes to assess the performance of courses that are well-established and involve clear governance and communication practices.
- Most universities use measures such as completion, graduate outcomes, and student satisfaction (via the National Student Survey) as part of their review processes.
- Variation between universities primarily occurs in:
  - the weight placed on measures of value compared with financial sustainability
  - internal capacity for regular and comprehensive monitoring
  - the engagement of stakeholders inside and outside the institution (eg students, academic staff, employers)
- Several institutions are reviewing current processes or piloting new approaches. Universities recognise that using relevant and useful data is an important part of a refreshed approach.

Views on the framework

- All participating universities agreed that the aims and principles of the framework are appropriate and timely.
- All participating universities reported that they would be able to put the framework into place with few problems.
  - Many agreed that the principles are in line with their mission, and there would be value in reviewing current internal processes to ensure practices align with the principles we set out.
  - All universities agreed that they could publish a transparency statement, and recognised the value of this to internal audiences (academic staff and students) and external audiences (wider public, regulator).

  - For some universities, publishing a transparency statement would mean reviewing the content and language of existing public statements or moving and adapting documents from internal to public websites, whereas for others the statement would need to be written from scratch.

- Putting the framework in place is considered relatively low burden, largely as it is designed to be embedded within existing structures and aligns with wider discussions on quality and value in higher education, as well as university strategies in this area.

- Participating universities saw value in including the wider benefits of higher education – particularly social responsibility and economic growth – in programme reviews.

- There is strong support for the emphasis placed on contextualising measures in a way that allows programme review processes to be flexible to the nuances of a course's student base and location.

- There is a lot of interest in exploring approaches to monitoring social responsibility and contributions to economic growth. These forms of impact feature in many institutional missions and strategies, but are rarely embedded in programme reviews in a systematic way due to a lack of well-developed good practice in the sector.

- Beyond internal processes, universities recognise the value in better showing the social and economic value of their provision to students and the public.

What were the challenges?

Common challenges focused on metrics and measures, including those reflecting the wider value of courses. Key issues included:

- **Granularity:** External data sources may only be available at a higher level (eg across broad subject areas), which can make drawing conclusions about an individual course difficult. Smaller courses or subject areas may not have enough published data points to be used reliably in assessments.

- **Currency:** Some data sources, particularly those on graduate outcomes, are outdated in terms of how useful they are for assessing current provision or how they apply to a new cohort or students. This limits their use, unless wider context is taken into account.

- **Using appropriate controls:** To assess course value, institutions should be able to control for differences not directly related to the provision itself, such as student demographics and the local economy. Some datasets may not have the data needed at the appropriate level to control for these factors.

- **Practicalities of using metrics:** Both time and resourcing will limit the speed at which some institutions are able to put the framework in place.

What helped?

Universities highlighted the following actions that could be taken to help them put the framework in place:

- **Holding discussions with other institutions** on implementing key aspects of the framework, eg using metrics and using contextual information, including surveys. Universities were interested in the possibility of us developing platforms for institutions to share good practice and lessons learned.

- **Keeping a flexible approach in the framework**, aligning with sector discussions on quality and value of courses and institutional strategy in this area, to ensure the framework is low burden. This makes it more likely to be put into practice and adds value to what institutions are thinking about and planning internally to look at the quality and value of courses.

- **Supporting institutions' processes of developing internal approaches** to some of the more experimental measures in the framework. Standardised approaches would be helpful to ensure that methodology is robust and usable for institutions with lower capacity and resource in this area.

- **Providing information to institutions at a programme or subject level to allow monitoring.** This would encourage uptake, particularly if reviews are to be carried out annually. Participants strongly felt that we should work with the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and the OfS to investigate how this information could be provided.

- **Aligning measures and processes with other data requirements** such as those used for statutory and regulatory functions.

Next steps

Universities are committed to delivering high-value, high-quality and sustainable courses that meet the changing needs of students, employers, and local areas.

Our members have told us that facilitating discussions between institutions and providing support to implement the framework would be helpful. They are also strongly interested in taking a more proactive role in the development of quantitative and qualitative data on value.

Alongside the framework, we will help institutions share good practice with each other and encourage greater consistency in line with the framework. We will also establish a forum on the development of quantitative and qualitative data on value. This includes engaging with those universities in the devolved nations that would like to be involved.

Supporting our member institutions

We commit to supporting our member institutions in England to use the guidance as set out in this framework and enhance the consistency and transparency of processes across the sector. This will include:

- Embedding the principles set out in the framework for programme and course review processes.
- Encouraging and advocating the use of metrics that reflect the wider value of courses as part of programme and course review processes.
- Help share best practice in programme review processes in a way which avoids problems with competition between providers.
- Evaluating take up of the framework, including institutional transparency statements, in early 2023.

Forum on developing quantitative and qualitative data on value

We'll oversee the establishment of a forum exploring the development of quantitative and qualitative data on value. Membership will be open to university staff leading on the use of data, as well as key stakeholders involved in the development of data. The forum will:

- Engage with data providers to explore options for introducing centralised, available data for measures in formats that support comparisons within and between institutions.
- Consider how the use of data, metrics and qualitative contextual information can reflect changing student, graduate, employer, and government views of the value of higher education courses. This includes the impact of the pandemic on graduate careers, and an increased focus on flexible models of study, among other factors.
- Engage with a wide range of stakeholders, including data experts, users, and those to which the data relates. We will use their feedback to influence decisions on the appropriate use of metrics.

Annexe 1: Advisory group membership

Professor Julia Buckingham CBE (Chair of advisory group), former Vice-Chancellor and President, Brunel University London, and currently Chair of the Institute of Cancer Research.

Professor Graham Baldwin, Vice-Chancellor, University of Central Lancashire

Professor Dame Janet Beer DBE, Vice-Chancellor, University of Liverpool

Professor Frances Corner OBE, Warden, Goldsmiths University of London

Professor Susan Lea, Vice-Chancellor, University of Hull

Professor Edward Peck CBE, Vice-Chancellor, Nottingham Trent University

Professor Malcolm Press CBE, Vice-Chancellor, Manchester Metropolitan University

Professor Lisa Roberts, Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive, University of Exeter

Professor Andy Schofield, Vice-Chancellor, Lancaster University

Professor Mark Smith CBE, President and Vice-Chancellor, University of Southampton

Professor Wendy Thomson CBE, Vice-Chancellor, University of London

Professor Maria Hinfelaar (observer on behalf of devolved nations), Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive, Wrexham Glyndwr University

Annexe 2: Technical note on suggested metrics

Development

The metrics we've recommended are informed by our development over recent years of a 'value framework' primarily designed to engage UK Government and other stakeholders in how we can measure value in higher education.

The themes covered reflect literature on the benefits of higher education to graduates and non-graduates. Many of the measures have been sourced from existing functions across the sector. Where there are gaps, suggestions are provided from publicly available data where possible, or internal institutional data if not.

The primary sources used to inform the themes and measures are:

- The UK Government's 2013 'quadrant' report reviewing the evidence on the economic and non-economic benefits of higher education participation for graduates and non-graduates, and the 2018 research commissioned by DfE that updates the findings.

- The OfS Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework, including views from the Independent Review led by Dame Shirley Pierce.

- UK performance indicators developed by the Higher Education Statistics Agency.

- League tables, particularly those using innovative metrics such as Times Higher Impact measures (eg SDGs) and the Guardian University Guide (value added).

- Additional research by various organisations into the cultural and economic impact of higher education. For example, the English Social Mobility Index, and the Nesta Creative Industries report on creative HE graduates.

- Discussions with government on priority occupations and industries.

Further detail on suggested metrics

Core metrics

Theme	Metrics	Comments and considerations
(1) Student and graduate views	A. **Student satisfaction:** The percentage of students who were satisfied with the overall quality of their course, using National Student Survey (NSS) scores for: • The teaching on my course (NSS Q1-4) • Assessment and feedback (NSS Q8-11) • Academic support (NSS Q12-14)	The measures will be updated to reflect changes arising from the expected review of the NSS. The first phase of the review suggests it is likely these metrics will continue to be collected. However, potential changes to the collection of data may result in less timely information, less granular data, or availability of further measures.
	B. **Meeting student expectations:** Comparison of outcomes compared to expectations gathered from students entering institutions, to reflect diversity of student views.	Requires collection and analysis of internal data by universities. We will identify and share existing good practice in this area.
(2) Student outcomes	C. **Continuation:** The percentage of students who were enrolled at the start of the academic year and progressed to the following year, obtained a qualification, or transferred to another institution (HESA).	In line with HESA's definition of non-continuation (previously applied to UK Performance Indicators), students who are recorded as leaving within 50 days of starting their first academic year should be removed from the figures. This is because when a student leaves very early in the academic year, there may be reasons which are unconnected with the course or the higher education provider.

	D. **Completion:** The percentage of students who start on a course, projected to leave with a qualification (HESA).	The use of projected figures means that the statistic currently used by HESA does not accurately reflect final outcomes.
	E. **Value added – learning gain:** Approaches that compare degree results with entry qualifications, ie relative learning gain, or 'value added'.	Although there is no widely accepted nationally agreed approach, institutions are encouraged to look at potential approaches for their circumstances. Examples highlighted by institutions include: • the value-added measure used by the Guardian University Guide • approaches in the Office for Students Learning Gain Pilot, which supported 13 projects exploring the effectiveness of new methods of measuring learning gain • additional work by the OfS, which looked at opportunities to assess leaning gain using administrative data
(3) Graduate prospects	F. **Highly skilled employment:** The percentage of graduates in highly skilled employment or further study 1.5 years after qualifying (Graduate Outcomes Survey)	The OfS have a set definition of appropriate 'progression' identified through graduate outcomes data, as per their 'Proceed' metric. Institutions may want to consider: • prioritising employment in certain sectors in line with expectations of students, employers, and course designers • how to handle outcomes such as self-employment and voluntary working

		• how changes in the economic landscape are accounted for (eg national, or local economic shocks) and how this affects monitoring change over time
	G. **Graduate unemployment:** Graduate unemployment (Graduate Outcomes Survey)	Institutions will need to consider whether to adjust for changes in the wider economy and labour market. Sensitivity to varying employment opportunities by region may also need to be considered, including normalising for local labour markets.
	H. **Graduate views on career progress:** The percentage of graduates that feel their current work is meaningful, that their current work fits with future plans and that they are utilising what they learnt during studies, 1.5 years after qualifying (Graduate Outcomes survey)	HESA has released a methodology for a statistical measure based on graduate views, building on the work of the Measuring Job Quality Working Group.

Contextual metrics

Theme	Metrics	Comments and considerations
(1) Supporting economic growth	I. **High-growth industry employment:** The proportion of graduates employed within high growth industries, particularly in low growth areas (Graduate Outcomes Survey and regional economic data)	There is currently no centralised platform or system for applying regional economic data to graduate outcomes data. Decisions would need to be made – at institution level or advised at sector level – on the threshold of 'high growth' and 'low growth' geographies and industries.

	J. **Employment in innovative industries:** The proportion of graduates working in high innovation industries and businesses (Graduate Outcomes Survey and UK innovation survey)	There is currently no centralised platform or system for applying industry innovation data to graduate outcomes data. The UK Innovation Survey looks at innovation at a high industry level and at a NUTS1 regional level. However, it is not sensitive to differences in innovation activity between businesses and occupations within given industries. Decisions would need to be made – at institution level or advised at sector level – on the threshold of 'high innovation' industries.
	K. **High skilled employment in low growth areas:** The proportion of graduates who work in “professional” jobs in the low growth regions/areas (Graduate Outcomes Survey and regional economic data)	Decisions would need to be made – at institution level or advised at sector level – on the threshold of 'low growth' geographies.
	L. **Employment or further study in local areas:** The proportion of graduates who work or remain for further study in the local area.	Decisions would need to be made – at institution level or advised at sector level – on how local areas are defined.
	M. **Entrepreneurship:** The proportion of graduates who start/own their own business which survives for at least three years (HE-BCI at provider level)	Data is not available at sub-provider level through the current version of the Higher Education Business and Community Interaction. However, a review is expected in the near future. Internal records on graduate start-ups may provide more granular information. Self-employment data from the Graduate Outcomes

		Survey (including main source of business funding and employee numbers) can be used, but may be of limited value given it looks at only 1.5 years after course completion.
(2) Social responsibility	N. **Value added - social mobility:** Use of the English social mobility index to look at value-added contribution of institutions and course	Institutions will want to consider the benefits and limitations of using a composite measure as part of their review processes. Individual elements of the composite measures could be used.
	O. **Key attainment gaps (HESA):** The gap in the percentage of awards between target groups of students (HESA)	Target group of students may be identified through underrepresentation at discipline or sector level, nationally or locally.
	P. **Progression into public health professions:** The proportion of students progressing into medicine, nursing, midwifery, and allied health professions (Graduate Outcomes Survey)	The Graduate Outcome survey includes a question on whether graduates are employed at an organisation that is part of the NHS. The data on responses to this question is not currently published. A measure based on this data would be limited to those working in the UK.
	Q. **Progression into teaching professions:** The proportion of students progressing into teaching (Graduate Outcomes Survey)	A sector-wide consensus on identification of teaching jobs from Graduate Outcomes occupational data might be valuable if there are inconsistencies. This measure would miss graduates on postgraduate teaching training courses, as these cannot be distinguished from other postgraduate diploma or certificate studies.

	R. **Contribution to culture:** The proportion of graduates working within cultural establishments or occupations (Labour Force Survey, Graduate Outcomes Survey, and additional categorisation)	A sector-wide consensus on identifying culturally relevant jobs from Graduate Outcomes occupational data might be valuable. We have previously developed an initial and limited list from SOC 2010 that would require consultation before recommended use: (245) Librarians and related professionals; (247) Media professionals; (341) Artistic, literary and media occupations; (342) Design occupations; (344) Sports and fitness occupations.
	S. **Positive contribution to the environment:** The proportion of graduates working in industries or roles with a primary function of positive environmental activity (Labour Force Survey, Graduate Outcomes Survey, and additional categorisation).	A sector-wide consensus on identifying environmentally relevant jobs from Graduate Outcomes occupational data might be valuable. We have previously developed an initial and limited list from SOC 2010 that would require consultation before recommended use: (214) Conservation and environment professionals; (355) Conservation and environmental associate professionals.
(3) University mission and strategy	T. **Mission-oriented value:** Measures that capture alignment with university mission and strategy. For example, links between courses and areas of strategically important research, courses that are critical to the provision of skills to local employers, or courses that are linked to widening access relationships with local schools.	This needs to be defined and developed at institution level, but common themes and needs will inform our support to develop metrics at a sector-level.

Annexe 3: Institutions participating in the framework pilot

Participated in full ‘proof of concept’ pilot exercise

University of Brighton

University of Gloucestershire

Manchester Metropolitan University

Staffordshire University

University of Suffolk

York St John University

Participated in focused discussion

Arts University Bournemouth

University of Bradford

University of Essex

University of Hull

University of Liverpool

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