

Excerpt from Duklas, J., Maki, K., Pesaro, J., Brady, J. (June, 2014). ARUCC PCCAT Transcript and Transfer Credit Nomenclature Study: an Examination of Current Practices at Canadian Postsecondary Organizations. Calgary, Alberta: Association of Registrars of the Universities and Colleges of Canada (ARUCC) & Pan-Canadian Consortium on Admissions and Transfer (PCCAT).

United Kingdom <pages 52-54>

System Overview

Responsibility for Higher Education in the United Kingdom is delegated to England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Higher education institutions are independent, self-governing bodies established by Royal Charter or legislation, and most are partially funded by government. There are 133 members of Universities UK, which includes the executive heads of all of the universities in the United Kingdom and some colleges of higher education (Universities UK, 2013a). In addition, there are over 550 institutions that offer courses leading to a degree, but who do not have the authority to award degrees; a university or higher education college that has degree granting authority validates their courses (Government of Alberta, 2007). Further details on the overall UK system are provided in Appendix G.

Transcript Standards and the Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR)

In the UK, the Academic Registrars Council (Academic Registrars Council (ARC), n.d.) is the professional organization for “senior managers responsible for academic administration of student matters in publicly funded universities and colleges of higher education in the United Kingdom” (p. 1). While the organization, like ARUCC, appears to provide services, such as professional development opportunities and practitioner groups focused on admissions, assessment, and student records, there does not appear to be a publicly accessible transcript guide similar to the ARUCC Guide.

In 2003, higher education institutions in the UK agreed to issue a diploma supplement-like document to all graduates, in accordance with the Berlin Communiqué of the Bologna Process and conforming to the strict guidelines set out by the UK National Recognition Information Centre (NARIC) and the Europe Unit of Universities UK (UK Higher Education Europe Unit, 2006). Following subsequent years of consultation and trials for an appropriate solution for the United Kingdom (Universities UK, 2007; Universities UK, 2012), the Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR) was introduced in 2012, as a “[C]oncise, electronic document produced by a higher education institution which provides a record of a student’s achievement during their time in higher education. A maximum of six pages long...it must adhere to a standard template...and be verified by the academic registrar or equivalent officer in each institution to confirm credibility” (Universities UK, 2012, p. 5).

The HEAR conforms to the data fields required for the Diploma Supplement, yet is distinct in that it is “[A]n electronic rather than paper document; ... is an ongoing record that is updated throughout the student’s career with the institution...; and it contains information about the student’s non-academic achievements that can be verified and validated by the institution” (ECCTIS, 2013). Universities UK (2014) has produced a HEAR Reference Pack for institutions, which includes an overview of the contents of the HEAR/Diploma Supplement, detailed commentary defining what is to be included in each section, a checklist for implementation, and standardized information on the national education system. The HEAR comprises eight main sections, following the format of the European Diploma Supplement, as seen in Table 4 below. *Bringing It All Together – Introducing the HEAR* (Universities UK, 2012) also

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includes a comprehensive glossary of acronyms and terms (pp. 26-27) and an exemplar HEAR document (pp. 46-57).

Table 1: Summary of Contents of the Higher Education Achievement Report

Item	Components
1. Information identifying the holder of the qualification	1.1 Family name(s) 1.2 Given name(s) 1.3 Date of birth (day/month/year) 1.4 Student identification number or code (if available)
2. Information identifying the qualification	2.1 Name of qualification and (if applicable) title conferred 2.2 Main field(s) of study for the qualification 2.3 Name and status of awarding institution 2.4 Name and status of institution (if different from 2.3) administering studies (in original language) 2.5 Language(s) of instruction/examination
3. Information on the level of the qualification	3.1 Level of qualification 3.2 Official length of programme 3.3 Access requirement(s)
4. Information on the contents and results gained	4.1 Mode of study 4.2 Programme requirements 4.3 Programme details (e.g., modules or units studied), and the individual grades / marks / credits obtained (if this information is available on an official transcript this should be used here) 4.4 Grading scheme and, if available, grade distribution guidance 4.5 Overall classification of the qualification (in original language)
5. Information on the function of the qualification	5.1 Access to further study 5.2 Professional status (if applicable)
6. Additional information	6.1 Additional awards (Accredited performance in non-academic contexts) 6.2 Additional recognized activities undertaken by students which demonstrate achievement 6.3 University, Professional and Departmental prizes 6.4 Further information
7. Certification of the HEAR	7.1 Date 7.2 Signature 7.3 Capacity 7.4 Official stamp
1. Information on the national higher education system	

Source: Higher Education Achievement Report – A reference pack for institutions. Universities UK, 2014, pp.2-4.

The *International Education Guide for the Assessment of Education from the United Kingdoms of Great Britain and Northern Ireland* (Government of Alberta, 2007) provides a comprehensive overview of history and development of the secondary and postsecondary education system in the UK. Considerable

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detail is provided with respect to program opportunities, admission requirements, grading, and progression. The document also includes numerous examples of certificate and degree parchments and transcripts from a variety of higher education institutions in the United Kingdom (pp. 63-80).

Appendix G: International Research

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System Overview

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The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) is an independent body that provides advice, guidance, and support to UK colleges, universities, and other institutions to support the best possible higher education experience for students in the UK (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, n.d.). The QAA publishes the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2014), which defines expectations in terms of academic standards, quality, and information provision that must be met by all higher education providers. It also conducts peer reviews of institutions and publishes reports of the findings. In addition, the QAA publishes a wide range of research reports and reference guides on academic standards and quality, and provides advice to government on proposals for new institutions wanting degree granting authority.

Qualifications Frameworks¹

The QAA has developed two frameworks that describe and organize the achievements represented by higher education qualifications in the United Kingdom, including degrees, diplomas, certificates, and other academic awards granted by a higher education provider with degree awarding authority. One framework applies to higher education qualifications in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, and a second defines qualification requirements in Scotland (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, n.d.b.).

¹ <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuringstandardsandquality/qualifications/Pages/default.aspx>

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England, Wales and Northern Ireland²

The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2008) has five levels, three at the undergraduate level and two post-graduate levels. These are numbered 5-8 in the FHEQ, building on levels 1-3, which precede higher education in the National Qualifications Framework. Each level in the framework has a descriptor that reflects the distinct levels of intellectual achievement associated with that qualification (p. 7). The descriptors include two parts: a statement of outcomes that a holder of the qualification should be able to demonstrate and a statement of the more general capabilities that a student would be expected to have developed (p. 14). Many academic programs also develop subject-specific benchmarks that define specific outcomes for learning in a particular subject area (p. 26).

Complementary to the FHEQ is the Higher Education Credit Framework for England, recognizing that credit is widely used by higher education providers in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland (p. 27). The FHEQ also includes sections on naming qualifications, awarding qualifications, definitions, and an annex that describes the alignment between the FHEQ and the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (FQHEA). The generic qualification descriptors for each cycle of the FQHEA use the Dublin Descriptors from the Bologna Process and are built on the following elements: knowledge and understanding, applying knowledge and understanding, making judgments, communication skills, and learning skills (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2011, pp. 21-25).

As reported in the overview for the European Union, the Bologna Process was developed “as a means of promoting mutual recognition of qualifications, demonstrating transparency of systems and easing the mobility of staff and students across higher education in Europe” (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2010, p. 1). One of the key features of the Bologna Process is that each country has responsibility to develop a national qualifications framework, and to validate that framework against the overarching FQHEA. The verification report was completed and approved by the UK’s Quality Assurance Agency in 2009 (2010).

The UK has aligned the Higher Education Qualification Levels for England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, the Higher Education Credit Framework for England, and the first, second, and third cycles of the *Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area* (Universities UK Guild HE, 2013).

Scotland³

The Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland is part of the more comprehensive Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2001). Like the FHEQ for England, Wales, and Ireland, both the SCQF and the higher education framework are “outcomes-based structure[s] that make explicit the nature, level and volume of outcomes” (p. 3). The SCQF features twelve levels, with the Honours, Masters, and Doctoral degrees

² <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/The-framework-for-higher-education-qualifications-in-England-Wales-and-Northern-Ireland.aspx>

³ <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/FHEQ-Scotland.aspx>

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placed at levels 10, 11 and 12 respectively in the framework. At the Honours Degree level, the Scottish higher education framework is in “broad alignment” with the FHEQ, and at the post-graduate level, the two frameworks share “common structures, qualification titles, and qualification descriptors” (p. 4). Below the Honours Degree level, the SCQF reflects the unique range of qualifications in Scotland.

Each qualification in the SCQF is defined by both a generic qualification descriptor and a description of the typical number of credits required to achieve and be able to demonstrate the learning of that outcome. Qualification descriptors include three parts: a general description of the qualification, a statement of general outcomes that students achieving that qualification should be able to demonstrate, and a statement of wider general abilities that holders of the qualification should be able to demonstrate (p. 7). Many academic disciplines also include subject-specific benchmarks. The inclusion of credit requirements is designed as a measure of the volume of outcomes. “[O]ne credit point represents the learning outcomes expected to be achieved by the average learner at the relevant level in 10 hours of total learner effort” (p. 7). It is noted, though that “credit is a measure of outcome, not of study time” (p. 7).

The SCQF explicitly states that while the framework is designed

...to support lifelong learning by enabling, where appropriate, the transfer of credit between programmes and between institutions....It is not a mandatory process, and individual institutions remain solely responsible for all matters of credit recognition towards their awards (p. 8).

The SCQF also includes an annex on qualification nomenclature (pp. 23-24), which details terminology requirements relating to the level, nature, and subject of each qualification.

To assist students in understanding the relationships among qualifications frameworks and the resulting potential transferability of their qualifications across the United Kingdom, Scotland, Wales, Europe, and the European Higher Education Area, the QAA has produced a simple brochure, *Qualifications can cross boundaries – A rough guide to comparing qualifications in the UK and Ireland*, that provides a comparison of the regions’ respective qualifications frameworks (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2013).⁴

Data and Research

The Higher Education Statistics Agency collects a wide range of data from universities and colleges of higher education, on behalf of government in the UK. HESA provides data to authorized users and publishes reports on the performance of higher education institutions, research output, mobility, graduate employment, student access and retention, and learning/learning outcomes, among other topics (Higher Education Statistics Agency, n.d.).

⁴ http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/Quals_cross_boundaries.pdf

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Universities UK conducts and publishes wide ranging higher education policy and analysis research, including participation rates, funding, economic impact, globalization, mobility, and regulation. It also publishes annual 'patterns and trends' and 'facts and figures' reports, providing snapshots of the system (Universities UK, 2013b).