

**Health Professions Council  
Education and Training committee  
Higher Education Regulation Review Group concordat**

**Executive Summary and Recommendations**

**Introduction**

In May 2006 the Higher Education Regulation Review group published a concordat on inspection and data collection within higher education. This concordat is based upon the principle that *'Good regulation is proportionate, consistent, transparent, targeted and accountable. Best practice in management and governance within autonomous higher education institutions is to be encouraged and supported. Unnecessary burdens from external bureaucracy and regulation should be reduced.'*

These principles are in line with the Council's own intention that regulation should be targeted, risk-based, and proportionate.

The Concordat has already attracted sixteen signatories from across a variety of sectors, including organisations within the health regulatory arena including the Department of Health, and Skills for Health.

**Decision**

The Education and Training Committee is asked to:

- agree that the HPC should pursue signing up to the Concordat;
- request that the Executive prepare a paper for their next meeting in May with a the first draft of a possible HPC 'annex' to the Concordat; and
- note the attached copy of the Concordat, and to forward any comments on it to the Policy & Standards team. These comments will form part of the paper for consideration by the Committee in May.

**Background information**

The first eight pages of the Concordat are included with the papers. The subsequent forty-eight pages have not been included with the Committee papers in order to save paper. These pages contain the annexes provided by each signatory organisation, with an introduction to the organisation, their role in regulating higher education, then going on to detail how they meet the concordat, and what they intend to do in the future to ensure improvement.

The full concordat, including each of these appendices, can be downloaded here:  
<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/hegateway/uploads/HE%20CONCORDAT.pdf>

**Resource implications**

None

**Financial implications**

None

**Background papers**

None

**Appendices**

The Higher Education Regulation Review Group concordat

**Date of paper**

16<sup>th</sup> March 2007

Date	Ver.	Dept/Cmte	Doc Type	Title	Status	Int. Aud.
2007-03-16	a	ETC	PPR	HERRG concordat coversheet	Final DD: None	Public RD: None

Higher  
Education  
Regulation  
Review  
Group

# *Higher Education Concordat*

*On quality assurance arrangements and data collection*

*May 2006*

# Foreword: Higher Education Concordat

If you want to change the way things are done in any walk of life, you must win hearts and minds. This is the challenge for 'Better Regulation' initiatives in any sector. How do you sustain high standards whilst streamlining regulation and reducing bureaucracy across a multiplicity of public and private bodies?

It is a particular challenge in higher education, because of its complexity and diversity. Some hundred and thirty universities and colleges are funded by three government departments, as well as directly by students, charities and businesses. Institutions have developed rapidly over the last twenty years, expanding to provide opportunities for nearly half of Britain's young people and providing regional, national and international leadership in an era of global competition.

Universities and colleges manage revenues of about £18 billion, over half of it public money. Data, inspection and regulatory demands have helped to shape success and improve accountability; and universities have improved significantly their own management, audit and governance arrangements. It is this that enables us now to make the move to risk based systems of accountability and to reduce and simplify the requirements of government and their agencies.

Over the past few years significant changes in the way data is required and inspections managed *has* reduced the cost and burden of regulation. The Higher Education Regulation Review Group and its predecessors have been part of this effort and the Group commends, in particular, the way the Higher Education Funding Council for England and the Quality Assurance Agency have embraced this agenda and built targets to simplify and reduce costs into their new strategic plans.

But the number and complexity of our institutions of learning is mirrored by the number of agencies involved in funding, supporting and regulating their range of activities. This is clear from the number of signatories to this Concordat. Higher education is a success story and there are more risks than gains to be had from a fundamental redesign of its funding and inspection framework. Instead, this Concordat builds on what has been achieved. It commits its signatories to collaboration and the principles of risk-based regulation as well as, individually, to business plans which aim to share knowledge and eliminate overlap. This Concordat is about hearts and minds. It will be owned and implemented by its signatories over time. It creates a ratchet for eliminating unnecessary burdens on the sector, since each signatory will be required to account for progress and commit to further simplification in succeeding years. It aims to sustain or improve standards, whilst releasing one third or more of the current costs of accountability, freeing resources in the sector for what our universities and colleges are really about.

**Dame Patricia Hodgson, Chair, Higher Education Regulation Review Group**

**May 2006**

# CONCORDAT

on quality assurance arrangements and data collection for higher education institutions in England between:

**Department for Education & Skills;**  
**Department of Health;**  
**Higher Education Funding Council for England;**  
**Training and Development Agency for Schools;**  
**Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education;**  
**Office for Standards in Education;**  
**Adult Learning Inspectorate;**  
**Learning and Skills Council;**  
**Skills for Business Network;**  
**Skills for Health;**  
**Higher Education Statistics Agency;**  
**Research Councils UK;**  
**Institution of Engineering & Technology;**  
**Architects Registration Board; and**  
**The Information Centre for Health and Social Care;**  
**and supported by Managing Information Across Partners**

## General Principle

Good regulation is proportionate, consistent, transparent, targeted and accountable. Best practice in management and governance within autonomous higher education institutions is to be encouraged and supported. Unnecessary burdens from external bureaucracy and regulation should be reduced.

## 1 Context

- 1.1 This Concordat covers the collection of data and the external quality assurance of higher and further education provision in higher education institutions (HEIs) in England.
- 1.2 A high quality higher education system, offering good value for money and effectively contributing to the individual and collective knowledge base, is one of the main objectives of HEIs, the higher education community as a whole and all who fund or support higher education.
- 1.3 The public interest and the interests of higher education institutions, their supporters and funders, require the availability of good quality, useful, reliable and timely information about HEIs and reassurance about the academic standards and quality of the awards and the learning opportunities being provided by them, both individually and in partnership with other organisations.
- 1.4 It is important that the means used to collect information and to assure the standards and quality of learning provided by HEIs should make no greater demands on institutions than is absolutely necessary.

## 2 Objectives

- 2.1 Signatories to this Concordat are committed to a co-ordinated approach to data collection and the external quality assurance of higher and further education delivered in HEIs in England. They have agreed that they will subscribe to the principles and practices described below when dealing with HEIs in these areas.
- 2.2 In accepting these terms, signatories wish to move in the same direction: towards a less burdensome, more proportionate approach to quality assurance and data collection. They will rely so far as is practicable on institutions' own processes and do all they can to reduce duplication of effort on the part of both the collectors and producers of information.
- 2.3 In implementing these principles these bodies will also have due regard to the five principles of better regulation, as adapted by the Higher Education Regulation Review Group.

### 3 Data collection

#### Principle

An institution's achievements and the value for money that it provides are demonstrated by its performance against output indicators, based on reliable, timely, transparent data. Signatory bodies are committed to collect the data which they reasonably require about higher education institutions in the least onerous way possible. They accept the general principle that data should be collected once and used many times.

- 3.1 The core data on HEIs – information on their students, staff and finances – is supplied by institutions on a regular basis to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). HESA co-ordinates this process, analyses and publishes the data. HEIs are responsible for the accuracy and timeliness of the data and HESA is responsible for maintaining the integrity of the complete datasets, the accuracy of its published summaries and the timely provision of data to its stakeholders.
- 3.2 Signatory bodies will rely upon the data supplied by HEIs to HESA and not duplicate it. If signatory bodies require additional data or data not yet published by HESA, in order to analyse or assess HEI performance in particular areas, they will first approach HESA to see if these data can be made available to them.
- 3.3 This Concordat recognises, however, there will be situations when data not readily available through HESA is required by signatory bodies<sup>1</sup>. If HESA cannot supply the desired data to the timescales or quality standards that a signatory body requires, the signatory body may seek the information directly from the relevant HEIs. Wherever possible these data should be requested in the format and definitions of the HESA returns or in the manner in which data are produced internally by the HEI for its own purposes.
- 3.4 Signatory bodies will have regard to the costs and practicality of producing additional data and will do their best to keep such demands to a minimum necessary for their purposes.

### 4 Quality Assurance

#### Principle

An institution demonstrates its commitment to quality and standards through a culture of continuous improvement based on institutional values and the skills and attitudes of its staff. These are underpinned by the effective use of the systems and structures that it puts in place to assure and enhance the programmes of study and the learning which it provides. Signatory bodies are committed to assessing quality and standards in a co-ordinated and appropriate manner. Intervention from external agencies should be demonstrably risk-based – targeted on the weakest institutions.

<sup>1</sup> Throughout 'signatory bodies' refers to all those who have signed the Concordat.

- 4.1 An effective independent external quality assurance regime is a vital part of a modern, high quality higher education system. The main responsibility for creating and delivering high quality higher education rests with individual HEIs – not outside bodies – and their starting point for transparent accountability is their own governance and management structures. The Concordat is, however, concerned with situations when external monitoring by signatory bodies is required.
- 4.2 The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) is the body responsible for safeguarding academic standards in England and for maintaining the Academic Infrastructure (AI) on behalf of the sector. The AI provides a framework for higher education qualifications, standards and quality management systems in the UK. Through various audits and reviews, QAA assesses how well academic standards and quality are maintained and monitored in institutions, as measured against the AI. Signatory bodies will not duplicate this work; they will rely upon the QAA assessment to give an accurate picture of overall effectiveness of the quality systems for assuring the academic standards and the learning opportunities being provided by an institution.
- 4.3 In executing their functions, signatory bodies may have the need to assess, inspect or accredit particular aspects of provision not already covered by the activities of QAA. This may be particularly likely for subjects where the maintenance and enhancement of quality depends on partnership arrangements that reach outside higher education.
- 4.4 When carrying out these assessments, inspections or accreditations signatory bodies will use their best efforts to minimise unnecessary burdens on HEIs by working with each other and with the person appointed by the Minister to oversee progress and implementation of the Concordat as necessary by:
- using definitions and building on processes that are consistent with HEIs' internal processes and with the AI;
  - observing the data collection principles outlined in section 3 above, and using appropriate high level performance indicators to assess risks objectively;
  - having due regard to the financial and practical cost of inspection visits for the HEIs involved;
  - reducing the frequency, depth, and duration of inspection visits to institutions to no more than is necessary to discharge their statutory responsibilities and address any perceived risks;
  - co-ordinating such visits with other bodies; and
  - relying upon each other's findings, rather than duplicating them.
- 4.5 If, however, there is demonstrable cause for concern about particular provision in an HEI, relevant signatory bodies may inspect or review that provision in that HEI at any time.

## 5 Review

- 5.1 This Concordat will be reviewed in one year's time, and annually thereafter. It is agreed that the Minister for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education will appoint a person to take the lead in monitoring the implementation and effectiveness of the Concordat in reducing burdens on HEIs whilst providing funders with the data and quality assurance that they need.
- 5.2 The Higher Education Regulation Review Group (HERRG) will explore the scope for a concordat which would seek to apply these principles to the provision of data concerning research activity and the exploitation of research. This will be discussed with appropriate organisations involved in research.