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The future of quality assurance arrangements in England

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OUTLINE

- ▶ Context
- ▶ Strengths and Challenges within the current arrangements
- ▶ Strategic regulation
- ▶ Topics for discussion and debate
- ▶ Predictions
- ▶ Comments and questions

CURRENT CONTEXT

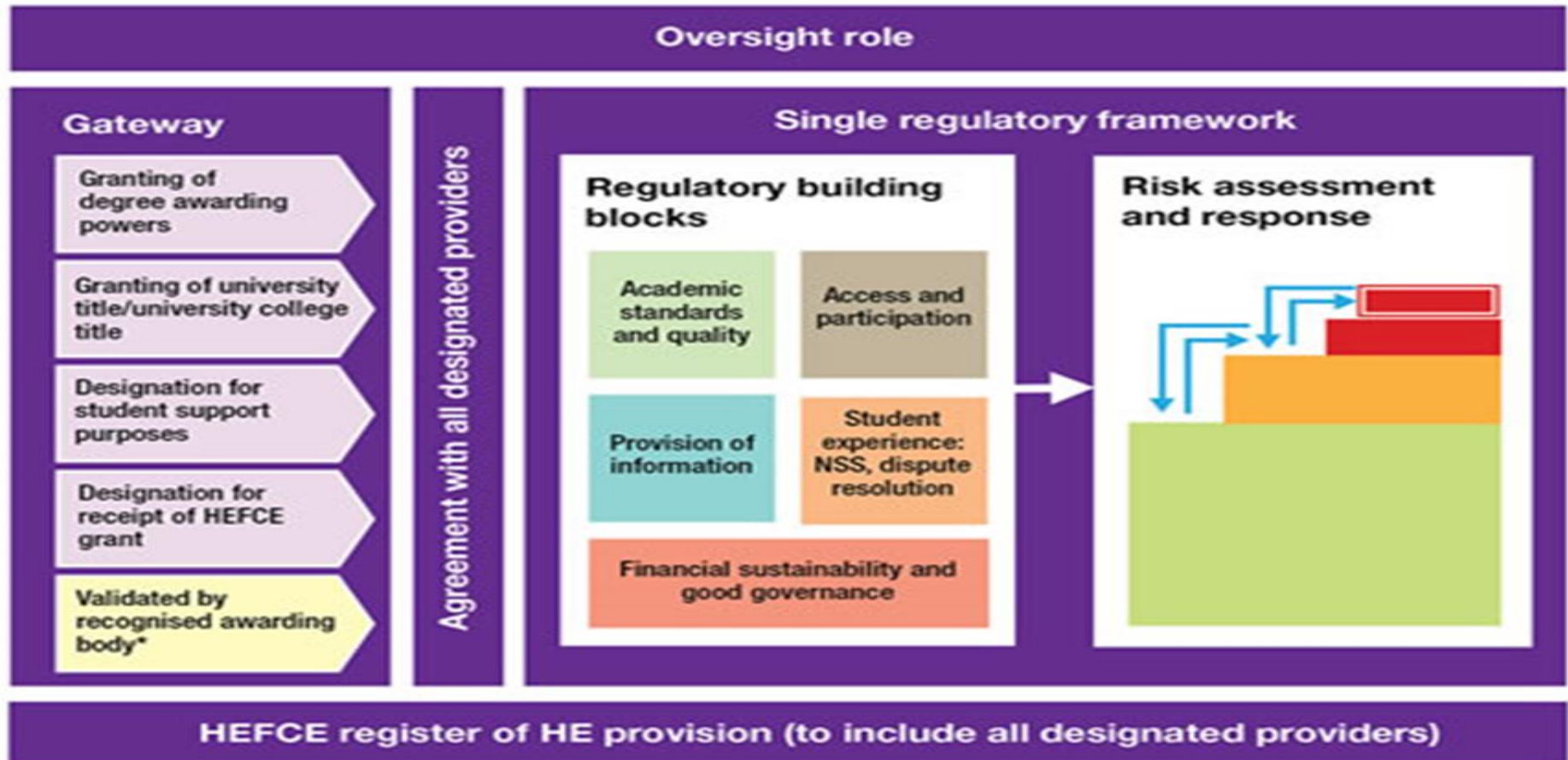
The future of quality assessment
in higher education

Quality Assessment Review

DÉJÀ VU?



OPERATING FRAMEWORK FOR HE IN ENGLAND



QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

- ◆ Institutions' own internal quality assurance systems and processes
- ◆ The UK Quality Code for HE
- ◆ Higher Education Review
- ◆ Publication of information about higher education
- ◆ External examining
- ◆ QAA procedure for investigating concerns about standards and quality
- ◆ HEFCE policy on unsatisfactory quality

STRENGTHS WITHIN THE CURRENT SYSTEM

- Respects institutional autonomy
- Independent peer-review
- Self & co-regulation – additional reassurance provided by external regulation and accountability
- Internationally respected and emulated
- Quality assurance and enhancement

CHALLENGES WITHIN THE CURRENT SYSTEM

- ▶ Shift in funding routes
- ▶ Differentiated sector, missions, levels of resource
- ▶ Relationship to other sectors and internationally
- ▶ Transnational education
- ▶ Tensions between competition and choice and robust assurances on the quality and sustainability of the offer
- ▶ Fragility of public and political confidence in HE
 - ▶ Reputational range
- ▶ 'Consumer' protections
- ▶ Complexity in the current operating system
- ▶ What sort of services will a quality assessment system be expected to provide?
 - ▶ Accountability
 - ▶ Assurance
 - ▶ Enhancement

STRATEGIC REGULATION

Regulate at a higher level

- ▶ Market and organisational level rather than individual courses
- ▶ Based on principles and focused on outcomes
- ▶ Provide flexibility for those you regulate
- ▶ Do not prescribe processes unless targeted detail is needed

Regulate in relation to risk / resilience

- ▶ Consider whether regulation is needed?
- ▶ Consider alternatives, for example
 - ▶ Guidelines
 - ▶ Better information for stakeholders

Target detailed regulation only where needed, for example

- ▶ To secure comparability
- ▶ To minimise bureaucratic burden

PRINCIPLES (Regulator)

Proportionality

- ▶ Interventions related to risk / resilience

Accountability

- ▶ Clear understanding and visibility

Consistency

- ▶ Judgements made
- ▶ Data and metrics
- ▶ Approaches and methods of regulation

Transparency

- ▶ Open and visible

Targeted

- ▶ Detail/action according to need

Coordination and competition

- ▶ Burden / Responsible autonomy
- ▶ Self, co-regulation & external regulation

KEY QUESTIONS FOR 2025

The future of quality assessment in higher education

Quality Assessment Review

- Can one concept of 'quality' still hold good? One QA system? For all providers? At all stages of their development?
- How do we still achieve reasonable comparability of degree standards?
- What recognition should we give to QA systems in other jurisdictions?
- Is clearly bounded and avoids 'creep'

'QUALITY WARS' FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

#QAmageddon

Who 'owns'
academic
quality, standards
and the
instruments of
assurance?

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION AND DEBATE

- ▶ Statutory responsibility
 - Regulation of what? Market, organisations, provision?
- ▶ Legislation – necessary or a nuisance?
- ▶ What's in a name?
 - Burden / Responsible Autonomy
 - Assessment / Assurance
 - Risk / Resilience
- ▶ Metrics
- ▶ Competition, Consumer Protection and Complaints
- ▶ Devolution
- ▶ Other sectors and international comparators / influences
- ▶ Transnational education

PREDICTIONS

- ◆ Increased statutory responsibility and powers – a single strategic planning, quality assurance and consumer protection body
- ◆ Student protection scheme
- ◆ Diversification of approaches to external quality assurance
- ◆ Strengthened scrutiny of TNE
- ◆ Improved data and information sharing
- ◆ Focus on quality assurance and accountability metrics
- ◆ ‘unbundling’ / decoupling of quality assurance and quality enhancement
- ◆ Increased focus on academic and organisational governance

FUTURE REGULATORY ARRANGEMENTS?

**Regulatory principles to inform / govern
regulatory approach**

Common code of practice
Awarding body recognition
Accreditation of qualifications
Common operating rules

**Limited specific / additional
requirements**
targeted according to risk

Less regulatory
requirements at
a specific /
prescriptive
level.

Less regulation
targeted on detail
and prescriptive
processes

More
regulation
that is
principles
and
outcomes-
focused

More high
level/common
regulatory
requirements - flexibility
for awarding bodies to
use different processes



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Comments and Questions

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