Queen Mary
University of London

Progress report on HEFCE data audit recommendations

Outcome requested	Audit and Risk Committee is asked to **consider** this report on progress to address the recommendations from the HEFCE audit of data that inform the 2013–14 quality-related research degree programme supervision fund allocation.
Executive Summary	[a] Between July 2013 and February 2015, HEFCE conducted a pilot audit of the data that inform the 2013–14 quality-related research degree programme supervision fund allocation. The audit resulted in three recommendations to improve data quality and a negative funding adjustment of *c.*£630k. HEFCE subsequently suspended the funding adjustment subject to satisfactory delivery of the action plan it had agreed with QMUL. [b] The action plan is currently on track to be delivered by the deadline at the end of July 2016. [c] Audit and Risk Committee is asked to consider this report in the context of its oversight of arrangements for financial control and the production of data returns to HEFCE.
QMUL Strategic Plan reference and sub strategies:	This paper relates to the following objectives in the QMUL Strategy: [2.2] educate to PhD level an increasing number of students, derived from both the UK and overseas; [6.3] increase income from educational activities through an enhanced portfolio of courses, and more effective use of resources.
Strategic Risks:	The Strategic Risk Register notes the following risk areas: [11] sustainable income streams for activities; [13] maintain effective and constructive governance.
Subject to prior and onward consideration by:	Considered by QMSE on 12 January 2015.
Confidential paper under FOIA/DPA:	No.
Equality Impact Assessment:	Not required.

Timing:	This is a progress report in advance of the deadline for delivering the action plan at the end of July 2016.
Author(s):	Jonathan Morgan, Academic Registrar and Council Secretary
Date:	21 December 2015
Senior Management/External Sponsor	Emma Bull, Interim Chief Operating Officer

Progress report on HEFCE data audit recommendations

1. Between July 2013 and February 2015, HEFCE conducted a pilot audit of the data that inform the 2013–14 quality-related research degree programme supervision fund allocation. The audit resulted in three recommendations to improve data quality and a negative funding adjustment of *c*.£630k. HEFCE subsequently suspended the funding adjustment subject to satisfactory delivery of the action plan it had agreed with QMUL.

    Recommendation 1: The College should enhance the data review procedures to ensure the reported student numbers and full-time equivalents (FTEs) are correct.

2. The actions agreed between QMUL and HEFCE in response to Recommendation 1 address issues with the governance and implementation of the student records system, and with the QMUL academic regulations.

    [a]   *Governance*. QMUL agreed to establish a new Student Administrative Systems Steering Group (SASSG) by the end of 2015–16 to oversee the maintenance and development of the student records system, with project boards focusing on specific areas, including postgraduate research (PGR) student records. The SASSG was established in October 2015 and is meeting regularly. The PGR project board has secured approval for a series of developments in the student records system, starting in January 2016.

    [b]   *Implementation*. At the same time that the HEFCE audit was underway, QMUL reviewed its procedures for calculating FTEs for PGR students. An error was identified in the way the student records system had been implemented that was resulting in FTEs being reported incorrectly for a subset of PGR students. This error had been put right for data returned in 2012–13 and subsequent years, and HEFCE has accepted this.

    [c]   *Regulations*. Senate approved a change to the academic regulations in October 2015 to ensure that PGR students are transferred to the correct status for HEFCE reporting purposes as soon as they submit the final thesis. The change is now being implemented for all current students.

    Recommendation 2: The College should review the PGR student population returned to HESA for 2012–13 to identify all students for whom erroneous values of FUNDCODE, UOA2008, UOAPCNT, COURSEAIM, STULOAD AND ENDDATE have been reported and submit amendments to correct these errors. Consideration of the 2013–14 data is also required.

3. Our review of the student populations returned in 2012–13 and 2013–14 showed that previous action taken (described in paragraph 2[b] above) to correct the reporting of student FTEs had been effective. As a result, differences in the re-calculated student populations were minimal and within the tolerance levels that are normally accepted by HEFCE. The review also demonstrated that the other values identified by HEFCE had been returned correctly, with more robust data quality processes put in place. HEFCE therefore agreed that it was not necessary for QMUL to submit amendments to the data for 2012–13 or 2013–14.

    Recommendation 3: Systems and processes should be amended to ensure errors similar to those identified in the audit testing do not recur in the future. In particular, the College should ensure there is a clear audit trail to the data returned, student COURSEAIM and UOA2014 are correctly coded for students

aiming for research degrees, and controls are in place to correctly report mode of study and STULOAD.

4.   The actions agreed between QMUL and HEFCE in response to Recommendation 3 address issues with data assurance, student engagement monitoring and the timeliness with which updates to data are made.

[a]   *Data assurance.* Additional data validation tasks have been identified from the audit report and have been embedded in the annual data audit schedule that is shared between ARCS and the Strategic Planning Office. The project (described in paragraph 2[a] above) to develop the student records system will document in more detail how the HEFCE data return is generated. During 2015–16, ARCS is working more closely with academic schools and institutes to ensure that the implications of what they do for HEFCE data returns are understood.

[b]   *Engagement monitoring.* An online supervision log was introduced in January 2015 and all PGR students and supervisors are required to maintain it from 2015–16. A system for reporting on engagement with the supervision log across academic schools and institutes will be made available by the end of January 2016. The requirements for reviews of academic progress of PGR students in the second and third years of research have also been formalised, and the project (described in paragraph 2[a] above) to develop the student records system will enable the outcome of these reviews to be centrally recorded. Together these developments provide a clearer audit trail between the data returned to HEFCE and evidence of individual student engagement in their research.

[c]   *Timeliness of updates.* Aspects of the academic regulations have been simplified to reduce the number of updates that are required. ARCS is working to a ten-day service standard for updates to the student record.

5.   Audit and Risk Committee is asked to **consider** this report on progress to address the recommendations from the HEFCE audit of data that inform the 2013–14 quality-related research degree programme supervision fund allocation in the context of its oversight of arrangements for financial control and the production of data returns to HEFCE.

Jonathan Morgan
Academic Registrar and Council Secretary
21 December 2015