

ARC Practitioner Group Updates

January 2025

<p>Admissions Kevin Rogers</p>	<p>Superbly assisted by Marie-Noel Earley as the group's new Deputy Chair and Richard Emborg as group secretary, the ARC APG met in person in September. We had presentations from Universities UK on their Blueprint for higher education and DataHE who presented some of the early messages from the 2023-2024 admissions cycle and some indications for the future.</p> <p>UCAS were in attendance and provided their update on Clearing and Confirmation (including year-on-year comparison), the effectiveness of the results embargo and key dates and milestones for the next cycle. Reform to the personal statement and the fee waiver for students on free school meals were foregrounded. A lively discussion on a proposal on Student Reviews on the UCAS website was held and this sparked considerable interest from members. UCAS have subsequently advised that they will not be pursuing this proposal any further.</p> <p>The supportive nature of the group continued with sharing of insight and good practice in the hot topics session, which considered matters such as identity checks for students, management of criminal disclosures, approaches to the new approach to the UCAS personal statement and responses to the UG fee increase for 2025-26.</p>
<p>Assessments Rebecca Dipancrazio</p>	<p>The Assessment Practitioners' Group convened virtually on 15 November 2024, Chaired by Alison Wells with support from Annie Sander. The Group welcomed Rebecca Di Pancrazio as the new Deputy Chair.</p> <p>One of the highlights of the session was an engaging presentation by Jenny Brown and Chloe Hastings from Queen's University Belfast, who shared insights into their innovative risk-based approach to External Examining and their digitised reporting system. This presentation sparked lively discussion, with members deeply interested in the practical applications and lessons learned from QUB's experience. The topic of risk-based External Examining is expected to feature in future meetings as the Group continues to explore its implications.</p> <p>Dr Charlotte Verney and Michaela Pittom provided an update on the initial findings of the sector-wide survey conducted as part of the QAA Collaborative Enhancement Project on the future of exam boards. This update offered valuable insights and set the stage for further dialogue as the project progresses.</p>

Later in the day, Hannah Lawrence from JISC presented a comprehensive package of assessment and feedback tools, which was met with enthusiasm from the Group. Following this, Dr Jill LeHihan from Sheffield Hallam University led an insightful session on the challenges posed by AI in assessment design and regulations.

The meeting concluded with a session to identify priorities for future discussions. Key topics included:

- Approaches to offering choice in assessment
- Further exploration of assessment competencies
- A proposal for a future panel activity involving other practitioner groups with overlapping interests

This productive meeting set the year off in a positive manner, with several exciting discussions and collaborations planned in the coming months.

Postgraduate
Rachel Birds

The Postgraduate Practitioner Group has held two meetings during the autumn term. The first event online was Friday 27th September 2024 and members explored the challenges that institutions had faced over the summer around recruitment. Key points raised were the challenges of instability in key overseas markets and the lack of appreciation in government of the positive impact of international PGRs on the UK's economic growth and global soft power through research partnerships. Members also discussed initiatives to improve PGR onboarding once recruited.

An in-person full day event was organised for Friday 29 November at Mary Ward House in London. It was a particularly well-attended and lively event with excellent speakers and engaged practitioners sharing their experiences and good practice.

Our first presentation was from Jenny Brown (Quality Assurance and Regulations Manager) and Karen Gruhn (Quality Assurance and Regulations Officer) at Queen's University Belfast. They spoke about a project they had led to introduce alternative thesis formats. The group learned how Queen's had managed to overcome considerable resistance to change through applying sound governance and project management principles.

Our second contribution entitled "From Manual to Magical: Automating University Workflows with Power Automate" was presented by Eve Walker and Emilia Kukula from the University of Nottingham. Their infectious enthusiasm for the benefits of

	<p>automation left us all inspired to consider applications in our own workplaces.</p> <p>The final presentation of the day was delivered by Tracy Wood, Graduate School Manager at the University of Huddersfield. Tracy assessed the pros and cons of a centralised Graduate School through her recent experiences of leading a move from a devolved to a centralised model. Her cheerful honesty about some of the challenges encountered and her parting advice to 'hang on in there as it will get better' were appreciated by the group.</p> <p>The day concluded with a world cafe style exercise designed to maximise networking opportunities. Participants discussed a range of themes including working with external partners to deliver collaborative provision, opportunities for the use of GenAI in research and research administration, institutional structures for supporting PGR education, approaches to write-up status and the implications of Data Futures.</p>
Quality Assurance Jacky Mack	<p>Our autumn meeting took place online on 21st November. This was the first meeting with our new Deputy Chair, Adam Child, Academic Registrar at Warwick University.</p> <p>We had a session on Quality Assurance team structures which came out of a thread on the ARC QPG email group. Alison Webster, Head of Quality Assurance from the University of Kent shared her recent experience of structural review and lessons learned.</p> <p>Ruth Birchell, Quality Enhancement & Standards Specialist joined us from the QAA and provided an informative update on the work to revise and update the Quality Code and other ongoing activity.</p> <p>Alison Jones, Head of Academic Quality Management and Jayne Langlands, Quality Operational Manager, both from the University of Salford briefly presented on a curriculum management platform, with a follow up and more time planned to be devoted to this in the spring meeting.</p> <p>The curriculum management systems special interest group set up by Anna Powell, Senior Registry Officer from the University of Huddersfield has continued to meet. The group met again on 26th November and this meeting focused on tendering and also</p>

	<p>included a presentation from JISC on procurement and licensing.</p> <p>Finally, Helen Haynes, Head of Quality Compliance Assessment joined us from the Office for Students to give an overview of headlines from the Insights brief published in October 2024 based on recent quality assessments. The brief identified some common factors that can affect the quality of the higher education students receive. The brief examines the main risks to quality from OfS published reports, under four headings: risks to delivery of courses and resources, risks to academic support and student engagement, risks to assessment of learning, and risks to academic leadership and oversight. The OfS are still considering a more integrated approach to these assessments and B3 monitoring. They are continuing with a small number of focussed quality assessment reviews in priority areas, and are still interested in franchise/partnership provision in this context. There was no further update on B3 priority areas for 2024/25.</p> <p>The next meeting is scheduled for 6th March and will take place online.</p>
<p>Scotland & Northern Ireland Iona Beveridge</p>	
<p>SROC Chris Carpenter</p>	
<p>Student Casework Anna Sendall</p>	<p>An in-person meeting was held just before Christmas on 13th December. The Group has been generously supported by Julian Sladdin from Pinsent Masons for many years; not only does Julian provide a highly insightful legal update at each meeting but enables us to make use of their offices in the various locations across the UK.</p> <p>This was the first meeting for me as Chair, and the new Deputy Chair, Lisa Dawson from Edinburgh. The Group Secretary, Anna Johns from Canterbury, has stepped down from the role after giving 4 years of excellent support to the Group. We wish her well and thank her for all her dedication and help over the years. Lisa and I were extremely grateful to John Dickinson from Lancaster who had previously held the role and who volunteered to step in to support the Group. We will be going out for a new Secretary in the next couple of weeks.</p> <p>We focused on two primary topics at the meeting:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Responding to the forthcoming OfS Condition of Registration on Harassment & Sexual Misconduct ➤ Managing market exit <p>The Group received presentations from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Julian Sladdin, Partner, Pinsent Masons • Chris Down, Chair of the Investigators Network, Anglia Ruskin University • Jo Nuckley, Head of Outreach and Insight, Office for the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIAHE). <p>The presentations generated much discussion as well as the identification of future hot topics. In particular:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (iv) the challenges with meeting some of the key requirements of the new OfS Condition, particularly in relation to delivering mandatory training for staff and students (iv) the findings of the recent legal case: Karmakar v Royal College of General Practitioners (iv) the good practice identified by the Investigators' Network (iv) OIAHE findings from recent complaints on the handling of cases of harassment & sexual misconduct, and advice on managing market exit (noting the publication in December of case studies on student transfers)
<p>Timetabling Stephen Lopez</p>	
<p>UKVI Simon Maller</p>	<p>The UKVI Practitioner Group held its first meeting of the 24/25 cycle on November 29, 2024. As per norm the meeting was in person and the first to be held at our new venue, Mary Ward House (MWH). With 97 out of 100 booked members attending (97% booking to attendance rate), a clear indication that the Group continues to provide value to the sector.</p> <p>As this meeting marks the official start of my tenure as Chair, I took the opportunity to re-think the meeting format, with the various speakers, sent in advance, a set of questions gathered from the Group's membership. The questions were anonymised and were wider ranging in their scope and content. This led to a much more iterative set of discussions with colleagues speaking (Home Office Policy/UKVI/UUK/UKCISA) all being grateful for them as they added depth to their briefings. This approach will, most likely, be taken forward for future meetings.</p> <p>The main presentations were from the Home Office Policy and UKVI (operational delivery) as per norm. Home Office Policy confirmed the nature of the tender for Secure English Language</p>

Test (SELT) and work which is being undertaken on English Language competency of international students more generally. It terms of the later, Home Office Policy, noted that they had received a significant number of concerns from a variety of sources which suggested that some HE providers might not have been as stringent in the application of their English Language requirements as their website/literature may suggest. In response to both matters the membership sought reassurance that when considering the tenders for the SELT contract that consideration would be given to the winning provides ability to manage large volumes of applicants wanting to take a test a relatively short notice, as this had been an issue, in the first year, when the current contract was awarded. The Home Office Policy colleague responded that capacity and other factors were considered as part of the tendering process.

With respect to the Home Office policy team looking into the English Language competency of students, reassurance was also sought that regardless of the outcome, the current exemption from SELT requirements that HE Providers benefit from would not be removed? In response, it was noted that at time of the meeting the scope of the work had not yet been agreed.

UKVI, informed the meeting that they were looking to consult on introducing a range of additional chargeable services (personal contact to answer challenging immigration questions etc) to the sector and that a questionnaire will be sent around early in 2025 to take views. Although welcoming any increase in service offered by UKVI, it was felt that what maybe proposed was close to the Personal Account Manager (PAM) service, (which had been part of a range of serviced for which providers were charged a flat fee of £8,000) that had been withdrawn circa 2019.

I will report back on these matters in due course.

With respect to the venue, a detailed questionnaire has been sent to the membership for their thoughts. However, initial feedback taken immediately after the meeting, has not been positive. Issue raised included:

- Room size too small, when in cabaret format, specifically lack of circulation space;
- Members who were seating towards the middle of back of the room could not see the presentation screen fully, due the floor levelling.
- Catering; the quantity much less then at Woburn House and no coffee available after morning session.

The above feedback aside, members were grateful that a central London venue had been sourced as this would likely ensure that

Home Office/UKVI colleagues would continue to attend in person.

Our next meeting in March, remains in person and will be at LSE and at a reduced rate – we pay for catering. However, although we are grateful for the use of a lecture theatre, it is not ideal, and I would welcome a further discussion regarding the funding of the Group to maintain the three in person meetings per year.