



Equivalent or Lower Qualifications (ELQs)

Introduction

From 2008/09 the Government will no longer incur the cost of students studying courses that are either equivalent to, or at a lower level, than their existing qualifications (ELQ). The purpose of this document is to: (a) outline the consequences of this initiative; (b) provide information and assistance towards the identification of ELQ students and (c) outline the mandatory information that is required to ensure compliance with the new funding arrangements.

Definition

An ELQ student is defined as a UK (Home) or EC student who is aiming for a qualification that is equivalent to, or lower than, one that they already hold.¹

This means that the University cannot receive from HEFCE any funding for students defined as ELQ. "The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland www.qaa.ac.uk should generally be used to determine a basic hierarchy of qualifications. Any revisions to those frameworks should be reflected as they are introduced." HEFCE²

Fees

In 2009/10 the ELQ policy introduced by the Government will be in force for all students, i.e. part-time and full-time undergraduate courses, and part-time and full-time postgraduate taught courses. Universities may decide to pass the full cost of tuition on to students.

University of Worcester position

The University has decided not to charge students starting ELQ courses in 2009 a higher fee rate. Students starting after the 2009 academic year will be charged a higher rate of tuition fee.

¹ DIUS/HEFCE definition

² Annex G October 2008 'HEFCE HESES08 - Students aiming for ELQ'

Exceptions

UK (Home) and EC students meeting the criteria below will be fundable from HEFCE³:

(a) Students in receipt of Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) for at least some of their current academic year.⁴

(b) Foundation Degree students.

(c) Students on a course of initial or in-service teacher training (in any mode or level of study). In-service courses are defined as courses for which the primary (but not necessarily the only) purpose is to improve the effectiveness of teachers, lecturers or trainers.

(d) Students on an undergraduate or postgraduate course (in any mode of study) for which an NHS bursary is payable.

(e) Students on an undergraduate course (in any mode of study) which leads to a first registerable qualification with:

GMC General Medical Council

GDC General Dental Council

NMC Nursing & Midwifery Council

HPC Health Professions Council for the professions of:

dietician

occupational therapist

paramedic

physiotherapist

GSCC General Social Care Council

SSSSC Scottish Social Services Council

CCW Care Council for Wales

NISCC Northern Ireland Social Care Council

RCVS Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons

(f) An undergraduate course (in any mode of study) which is a course for which the primary (but not necessarily the only) purpose is to improve the effectiveness of practitioners registered with one of the professional bodies listed in paragraph (e) above.

(g) In the case of the HPC, this must additionally relate to practitioners in the professions listed.

(h) Students registered on an undergraduate course (in any mode of study) which leads to a professional qualification that has been professionally validated by the National Youth Agency (NYA) or the Youth Council for Northern Ireland. These are courses leading to a qualification to practice as a youth and community worker.

(i) Students on an undergraduate course (in any mode of study) which is a course for which the primary (but not necessarily the only) purpose is to improve the effectiveness of professionally qualified youth and community workers.

³ Annex A 07/2008: 'Changes to fundability status guidance HESES08' annotated extract from Annex G

⁴ Year of instance reported in the HESES return

(k) UK (Home) and EC students who are aiming for an ELQ in a strategically important and vulnerable subject (SIVS) should be reported as HEFCE non-fundable unless they are exempt from the ELQ policy by virtue of paragraphs (a) to (i). See below for details of SIVS. The targeted allocation that HEFCE is providing for SIVS, following the introduction of the ELQ policy, is outside the mainstream teaching grant and does not in itself give exemption to students aiming for an ELQ in a SIVS.

(l) Students are considered to be aiming for an ELQ where they are aiming for a qualification that is no higher than one they have already achieved. Where students have currently stated multiple higher education qualification aims as part of the same instance, they should be recorded against the lower aim. For example, a student with a stated aim of both an HND and a degree as part of the same instance should be recorded as aiming for an HND.

Where the student's currently stated qualification aim for that instance is at a higher level than their highest entry qualification then none of the study for the year of instance should be treated as aiming for an ELQ. So, for example, if a student enters with a foundation degree and has a stated qualification aim of an honours degree, then they should not be treated as aiming for an ELQ. This would apply where the student is aiming for the honours degree through, for example, a one-year top-up from the foundation degree, or where the honours degree involves three years of full-time study.

m) All PGCEs (whether postgraduate certificates in education or professional graduate certificates in education) should be treated, for the purpose of the ELQ policy only, as being equivalent to honours degree level. This means that a student whose highest qualification on entry is PGCE, and who has no other postgraduate qualification, would not be treated as aiming for an ELQ if they enrolled on a postgraduate master's qualification.

n) Postgraduate research students.

o) Where students are studying for a first higher education (HE) level qualification by accumulating credit on a succession of 'courses' or modules, they should not be treated as aiming for an ELQ. Such accumulation of credit should be treated as progression towards a final undergraduate qualification. However, if the student already has an HE level entry qualification (as well as potentially having accumulated undergraduate level credit from recent study), then the student would be treated as aiming for an ELQ if that entry qualification was at a level that is equivalent to, or higher than, the credit towards which the student was now studying. A similar approach should be adopted where students are accumulating credit at postgraduate level: credit previously achieved should not generally be used to determine that a student aiming for further postgraduate credit is aiming for an ELQ, but a previous postgraduate-level qualification generally would.

HEFCE Non-fundable Courses

The following courses/examples are HEFCE non-fundable:

Students on courses funded by the Department of Health.
Pre-registration Nursing or Midwifery courses.

Students on closed courses: these are courses that are restricted to certain groups of people and are not generally available to any suitably qualified candidate. For example,

where a course is only available to employees of particular companies, that course is closed.

Students who are aiming for an ELQ unless they are exempt from the ELQ policy as defined in points (a) – (o).

How to Identify ELQ students

To determine whether or not a student is ELQ, the following information is required:

- i. the student's highest entry qualification
- ii. the qualification aim (level/award) of the course
- iii. exempted courses/SIVs

“It may be appropriate in particular circumstances to consider a hierarchy of qualifications within a single level, particularly where students are progressing through a succession of qualifications. In particular: Within level 7 of the FHEQ it may be appropriate to consider a masters qualification to be at a higher level than a postgraduate diploma, which in turn may be at a higher level than a postgraduate certificate. This may, however, not necessarily apply in all cases and will depend on the nomenclature adopted by different awarding bodies.

Within level 6 of the FHEQ it may be appropriate consider a bachelors degree with honours to be at a higher level than a bachelors degree without honours.”⁵

HESA Qualifications Upon Entry/FHEQ – Categories

Framework for higher education qualifications	National Qualifications Framework (as implemented from Spring 2004)
D (Doctoral) - Doctorates	8 - Vocational diplomas
M (Masters) - Masters degrees, postgraduate certificates and diplomas	7 - Vocational certificates and diplomas (NVQ 5)
H (Honours) - Bachelors degrees, graduate certificates and diplomas	6 - Vocational certificates and diplomas
I (Intermediate) - Diplomas of Higher Education and Further Education, Foundation Degrees, Higher National Diplomas	5 - Key skills Vocational certificates and diplomas (NVQ 4)
C (Certificate) - Certificate of Higher Education	4 - Vocational certificates and diplomas
	3 - Key skills, Vocational certificates and diplomas, A-levels, (NVQ 3)
	2 - Key skills, Vocational certificates and diplomas, Basic Skills, GCSE (Grades A* to C), (NVQ 2)
	1 - Key skills, Vocational certificates and diplomas, Basic skills, GCSE (Grades D to G), (NVQ 1)
	Entry - Basic skills, Certificates of achievement

Strategically important and vulnerable subjects⁶

⁵ Extracted from Annex G HEFCE/HESES October 08.

⁶ http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2008/08_38/

- science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects
- area studies and related minority languages, including:
 - Arabic and Turkish language studies and other Middle Eastern area studies, former Soviet Union Caucasus and central Asian area studies
 - Japanese, Chinese, Mandarin and other Far Eastern languages and area studies
 - courses relating to recent EU accession countries, especially those in Eastern Europe and the Baltic region
- modern foreign languages
- quantitative social science

Further Information

HEFCE Guidance on ELQs (published by the Higher Education Funding Council for England) available from <http://www.hefce.ac.uk>

HESES08 Guidelines – ‘Annex G’ October 2008 (published by the Higher Education Funding Council for England) available from

http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2008/08_37/08_37.doc

The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, August 2008 (published by QAA available from

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/FHEQ/EWNI/>