



SPA NETT on Qualification Reforms

Guidance for school and college references – what HEPs would like to know

July 2015

Introduction

In 2014/15 the Supporting Professionalism in Admissions (SPA) programme convened a National Expert Think Tank (NETT) consisting of practitioners from a range of higher education providers, plus representatives from SPA and UCAS, to consider the impact of pre-HE qualifications and curriculum reforms throughout the UK.

HE providers recognise that the reforms present schools and colleges with a number of challenges both in relation to resourcing and pedagogy. We are keen to understand how these challenges impact on you and your learners, to support you as best we can and to be able to take this information into account when considering applications.

In the changing qualification landscape, the reference will provide an increasingly important role in providing HEPs with information on the qualification programme a learner offers. Members of the NETT have created the following supporting guidance for schools and colleges on useful information to include within an applicant's reference.

If you have any queries relating to this resource, please do not hesitate to get in touch with SPA at enquiries@spa.ac.uk or 01242 544891.

Guidance on what to say about qualifications within an applicant's reference

We would encourage you to consider including the following useful information in an applicant's reference, in light of changes to qualifications and curriculums across the UK:

- Why the school or college chose to offer the provision that it does, and what the considerations were when deciding this programme. For example, did funding influence your choice of qualifications offered? Does the pedagogical preference of the school lead to certain methods of study being followed?
- We are particularly aware that there are pressures on staffing in schools and colleges. Where non-subject specialists are delivering courses, we would like to know about this. For example, a Core Maths qualification being delivered by a non-mathematician, or Physics being delivered by a Biology specialist.
- Any differences in the location of study. For example, some schools and colleges will offer certain subjects as part of a consortium and learners will need to travel to study a subject(s), or study online. Information regarding whether you belong to an academy chain would also be welcome.

- What information is used to determine predicted grades? For example, do you offer internal assessment?
- Some learners may be very new to your organisation at the point of application (for example, learners studying the Access to HE Diploma). In this situation, we would advise that you inform us that you are prepared to provide an additional reference later in the cycle, once more information is available. Ideally this would be prior to the 15 January deadline.

We recognise that space in the reference is limited, and the main focus of the reference should be on the applicant's suitability for the course(s) for which they have applied.

In [Unpacking Qualification Reform](#), UCAS recommended that schools and colleges create a webpage that details their qualification offering. The URL to this page can then be inserted into the reference to provide valuable additional information to HEPs about the school or college. The NETT endorses this recommendation.

The reference is not your only opportunity to provide information about your learners, and the webpage mentioned above does not replace direct engagement with HEPs. The reference presents the opportunity to open further dialogue with HEPs to explore the learner's profile further. HEPs welcome further dialogue with referees, and would urge schools and colleges to inform them of any changes to the learner's profile or circumstances which occur after the point of application.