

Joint Press Release: Universities UK and the Standing Conference of Principals
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DEGREE CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM SHOULD BE REVIEWED, REPORT SAYS

A joint Universities UK and Standing Conference of Principals (SCOP) report has been released today containing recommendations that will shape the future success for UK higher education, providing a richer representation of student achievement.

The report undertaken by the Measuring and Recording Student Achievement Scoping Group, chaired by Professor Robert Burgess, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Leicester, recommends the sector to take further action in three key areas:

- The current UK honours degree is a robust, internationally recognised qualification which continues to serve us well. However, there is a need to consider the classification system to ensure more effective and appropriate ways of representing student learning and achievement.
- Actively pursue a feasibility study on mechanisms for representing value added.
- Whilst acknowledging the autonomy of higher education institutions, efforts should be made to develop a common higher education credit system for England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Following the release of this report Universities UK and SCOP have invited Professor Burgess to constitute a joint UUK/SCOP Steering Group to consider how the recommendations can be taken forward.

Baroness Warwick, Chief Executive of Universities UK, said: "We warmly welcome this report and thank Professor Burgess and his group for the considerable work they have undertaken. These wide ranging issues are of great importance to institutions, students and wider stakeholders.

"The recommendations propose what could be quite a radical change for the sector, UK wide. We particularly support the recommendation that colleagues in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland should be fully involved in what happens next."

Professor Robert Burgess, Chair of the Scoping Group, said: "In an era of mass higher education, where curriculum change has been massive, there is an urgent need to devise an assessment system that reflects students' achievements and provides a meaningful picture of their abilities to employers.

"We need to provide students with an appropriate award that will stand the test of time, in the same way as the honours classification system has served us for the past two centuries."

Professor David Vaughan, Vice Chair of the Standing Conference of Principals and Principal of Cumbria Institute of the Arts, said: "The issues addressed in this report are of critical importance for all with an interest in higher education. We owe it to all concerned to get it right. The work of the Scoping Group provides a firm foundation. SCOP welcomes the publication of the report and the opportunity we now have to take the work forward."

Dr Kim Howells MP, Minister of State for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education, said: "I am grateful to Professor Burgess for his contribution. He has sought to provide a vision and an evidence base on which to build further work. His report raises a number of substantial and important issues which will need to be taken forward by the sector.

"The current degree classification system has been in place for around two centuries and served us well. But Professor Burgess and his Group have reached a view that the current system, for a variety of reasons, is not sufficiently fit for purpose and that it is time to consider alternatives. Any development of the current degree classification system is entirely for the sector to determine, in consultation with the main users - students and employers. But I agree with Professor Burgess it is absolutely essential that any changes do not undermine the high international standing of UK degrees.

"I welcome any proposals that will help to make learning more flexible for students. Credit systems, which make it possible to break off and start again without having to repeat learning, will become increasingly important as the routes into and through higher education become more varied."

Professor Sir Howard Newby, Chief Executive of the Higher Education Funding Council for England, said: "It is essential in a mass higher education system that the achievements of an increasingly diverse student population are properly recognised. I support the report's ambitions to ensure that information about the outcomes of learning fully meet students' needs, the interests of employers and the wider public. I also believe that the report's recommendations on moving towards a national credit system will benefit the differing requirements of learners."