

Common Awards TEI Consultation

January 2023

Classification of CertHE and DipHE programmes

Background

Numerous discussions have been held at meetings of the TEI Forum on the question of whether or not Common Awards undergraduate Diplomas and Certificates should be classified, with TEIs thus far unable to reach a consensus. Such a change to the Common Awards Core Regulations and existing practice would require a strong impetus in favour of the change from staff and students in TEIs, before it could be put to University Committees.

It was agreed by Forum members that the arguments on both sides should be presented to all TEIs as part of a formal consultation, in order for the Common Awards team to gather how far TEI opinion falls on each side.

The outcome of the consultation will be discussed at the next meeting of the TEI Forum on 27th April 2023, where Forum members will be asked to make a final recommendation to the Common Awards Management Board. If the TEI Forum, and the Management Board, are supportive of the recommendation to seek approval from the University to classify CertHE and DipHE programmes then this will be proposed to the relevant university committees. The proposal will need final approval from the University Senate (the highest academic body) as it will represent a significant departure to existing practice within the University.

If, however, following the consultation and discussion at the Forum, the TEI Forum does not wish to make a recommendation to the Management Board to seek approval to classify these awards, it has been agreed that the University will consider the matter closed.

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Please review the information below, which summarises the key arguments for and against the classification of undergraduate Certificates and Diplomas.

We would welcome responses from TEI Management Committees by **Friday 31st March 2023**, and would be grateful if feedback could include opinions from student as well as staff members of the Committees.

Arguments in favour of classifying undergraduate Certificates and Diplomas:

1. For some TEIs the standard Ordinand and Reader Trainee pathways is the completion of the undergraduate DipHE; that is, the majority of students complete this DipHE as part of their ministerial training. Classifying the undergraduate DipHE would recognise and value those students' achievements;
2. Classification would help students without existing formal academic qualifications at admission - for whom obtaining an undergraduate CertHE or DipHE award was a major achievement - feel that their qualifications were fully recognised and valued.
3. Classification of these awards could incentivise students to continue learning and studying. Each award could act as a stepping stone to further learning;
4. The quality of students' work ought to be recorded in the same way for other Common Awards programmes;
5. Students regularly ask what their classification was and want it to appear on their certificates and be available to put on their CVs, as a way of communicating achievements to future employers or educational institutions in a public way, beyond a transcript with marks;
6. Having classified awards could make admission to the Common Awards MA programme more straightforward. Currently the MA programme specification states that for admission to the MA:

'graduates (classed as first-class or 2:1 honours) in other disciplines with experience of Theology or Religious Studies to at least undergraduate Certificate level (awarded with credit or distinction, or with an overall mark of at least 60%) may also be admitted to the programme'
7. Classification can help TEIs and Durham to further monitor standards;
8. Student learning is often led by and focused around assessment. How they are assessed matters to students. Some of the most significant learning takes place through assessment; classifying awards values the completion of assessments.

Arguments against classifying undergraduate Certificates and Diplomas:

1. Classification of these awards risks placing too much focus on formal academic assessment and achievement, devaluing the formational side of ministerial training. Many students believe fulfilling learning outcomes in preparation for Ordination is more important than how well they do academically;
2. Classifications are likely to be unhelpful to those who achieved lower grades, who might be strong at ministry but weaker academically; classification could be demotivating;
3. Classification of these types of awards is not standard within the Higher Education sector, where Diplomas are generally awarded on a pass/fail basis. The Office for Students (OfS) qualification descriptors do not include classification descriptors for Level 4 and Level 5 programmes;
4. It has the potential to cause further regulatory implications for those TEIs who report data to OfS, which could be all TEIs in the future under proposals currently being discussed by the OfS*;
5. It would be a significant departure to existing practice within the University. CertHE and DipHE are only offered as exit awards for campus-based programmes at Durham (i.e they are not

offered as registered programmes like the Common Awards programmes), and they are not classified. There is no guarantee that the University Senate will approve the proposal;

6. Such a change to existing practice would have significant practical and financial implications for university systems and processes which sit outside of the Common Awards team. Work would have to be undertaken by the Student Registry Team and the Computing and Information Service to redesign parchments and re-programme the student records system to calculate the new outcomes for example, as well as potential implications for Congregation ceremonies;
7. All but one Common Awards programme would then be classified. This would significantly increase the workload of the Common Awards team at a time where many other important processes are actioned. Preparation work for the two overarching Boards of Examiners begins ~4 months ahead of each Board. The majority of the work involves preparation of the student marksheets for those with classified awards, which currently represent around 50% of the total number of students being considered; classifying the CertHE and DipHE programmes would effectively double the workload for preparation for the overarching Board of Examiners;
8. Additional work will likely be required on Moodle to reflect the classification of these programmes.

**Please note this consultation is currently ongoing internally at the OfS and has not yet been agreed for public consultation. The Common Awards team will contact TEIs with more information when available.*

Consultation

We would welcome responses from TEI Management Committees, indicating:

1. Whether or not your TEI is in favour of recommending to the University that Common Awards CertHEs and DipHEs are classified?
2. Any further feedback or comments you wish to make on the issue. It would be helpful to know how strongly staff and students feel about the answer you provided to question 1, and how much consensus there was within your TEI.
3. What other thoughts your staff or students have on how achievement might be recognised if it is not possible to classify Certificates and Diplomas?

We would be grateful if such feedback could include opinions from student as well as staff members of the Committees.