

Making an impact with the HEAR: key steps that Students' Unions can take

The recent HE White Paper for England¹ noted that 'the higher education sector has been developing the Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR) to provide a richer description of student achievement, including information about module marks, academic credit and other achievements that can be verified by their institution... we expect to see most institutions developing HEARs for all their undergraduate students from September 2012'.

Within the first institutions that have issued the HEARs to their graduates, a key feature of successful implementation is strong support from officers within the Students' Union, in both research and teaching-led Universities and University Colleges. This 'action list' is offered as one basis for making the most of the HEAR for students and graduates within your institution:

1. Identify whether your University has decided to implement the HEAR, and - if so - what plans it has to involve the Students' Union.

Because all institutions are different, HEAR work may be led from different locations; for example, by the University Academic Registrar or University lead for Learning and Teaching/Academic Quality etc. Those in the Registry will be central to producing the HEAR documents, but others will also be important; in Student Services or Careers, or with responsibility for developments in teaching and learning, or extra-curricular awards.

If there is a 'HEAR Committee' (most of the trial institutions have one) is the Students' Union represented?

2. Think about the different purposes of the HEAR from a student perspective²:
 - as a document students can use to review and plan during their time at University, perhaps with a tutor;
 - as a document students might make available to potential employers and/or postgraduate tutors before they graduate;
 - as an aide-memoire for students/graduates when preparing applications as a document - possibly electronic - presented to students when they graduate.

Identify, from your perspective, how the HEAR can be most useful to students and graduates within your institution.

3. Remember that the HEAR is constructed over the length of a course/programme (as reflected in the illustration). Students' Unions might find it helpful to make a start on agreeing a fixed number of 'easily' verifiable activities to begin with, while acknowledging that these can be added to as you get used to working with the institution in this way. This could be accomplished by identifying activities already supported by the Students' Union, which might demonstrate student achievement; e.g. in representative roles, volunteering and how such achievements are recorded and verified. Here, it

¹ Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (2011) 'Students at the Heart of the System' <http://tinyurl.com/6gkju6w>

² See the attached illustration, 'How the HEAR can be built up and used'.

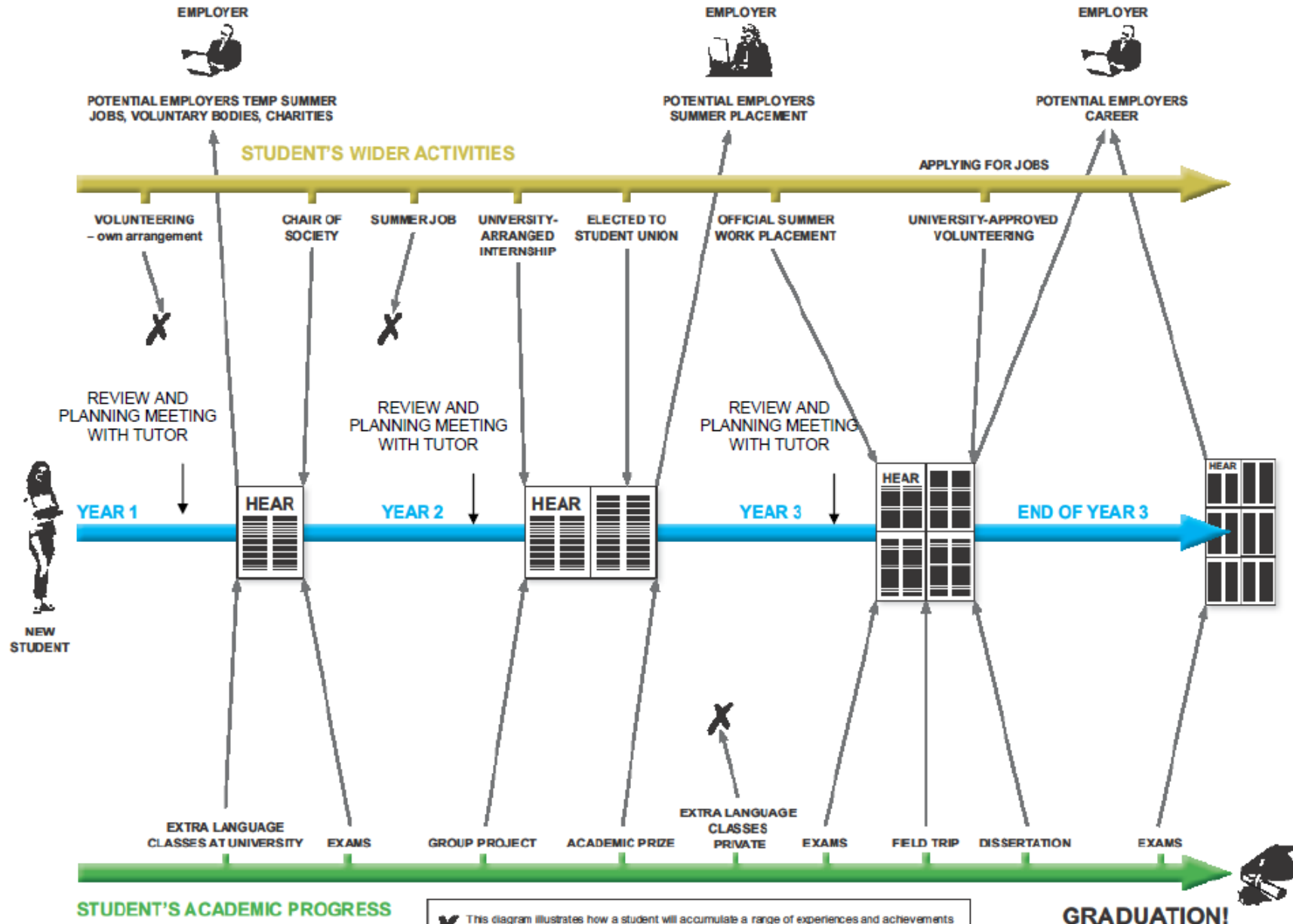
might be useful for Students' Unions to provide some documentation of verifiable activity to their University HEAR Committee. Some of this information might already appear on a transcript; if not, might it be included in Section 6 of the HEAR?³ If so, how should information about student achievements be fed into the Universities Student Records System?

4. Identify (and agree) with the University:
 - the protocols to be followed for the inclusion of such 'additional achievements' in the HEAR;
 - a system of monitoring participation that is acceptable to them and feasible with the resources available within the Students' Union. To ensure the workload is manageable, these should ideally be based on existing practices.
5. Think about new opportunities that might be pursued by the Students' Union to enable students to have additional achievements included within the HEAR.
6. Make sure that no student groups are disadvantaged by HEAR proposals, and that opportunities to demonstrate wider achievements for inclusion in the HEAR are open to all.
7. Consider and agree how the Students' Union can promote the HEAR to support achievement, community involvement and student development.

³ The HEAR Institutional Guidance suggests three categories for Section 6, with the second of these likely to be of most interest here:

- **Additional Awards** (Accredited performance in non-academic contexts measured/assessed, or with external accreditation recognised, by the University);
- **Additional recognised activities** undertaken by students which demonstrate achievement but for which no recognition is provided in terms of academic credit. This may include volunteering, representative roles or training courses provided or recognised within the institutional context which do not attract credit. It may also include significant additional verifiable roles; for example representation at national level in sport, or participation in activities encouraged within formal learning but demonstrated through individual student effort outwith formally accredited activities;
- **University, Professional and Departmental prizes**, rewarding both academic and non-academic achievement.

How the HEAR can be built up and used



X This diagram illustrates how a student will accumulate a range of experiences and achievements which then go into the HEAR (and some which do not, marked with an 'X') and points at which different employers might access the HEAR to find out about the student.