

An introduction to the QAA liaison project

Wendy Stubbs
Assistant Director
Development and Enhancement Group
w.stubbs@qaa.ac.uk



QAA

Background

- **2007 revision to Section 9 of the Code of Practice: Work-based and placement learning:**

Parameters:

“work-based learning is regarded as learning that is integral to a higher education **programme** and is usually achieved and demonstrated through engagement with a workplace environment”

“... the learning outcomes are intended as integral parts of a **programme of study**”

However:

- paragraph 19 recognised:

“There is also increasing interest in, and development of, work-based and placement learning that is of demonstrable value in its own right but is, at its outset, not planned as an integral part of a larger programme/award.”

- QAA statement – July 2008:

recognised the development of arrangements involving unit size learning, consortia/LLN arrangements, accreditation of in-house training and the need for “fit for purpose” quality assurance procedures

- HEFCE/QAA report August 2008: Quality assurance and employer engagement in HE learning:

Findings:

- Academic Infrastructure remains generally fit for purpose
- no desire for a separate QA framework but request for guidance on how to interpret the AI in this context
- demonstration of approaches to quality assurance – application of the Academic Infrastructure
- request that auditors/reviewers and assessors are fully briefed on various approaches

QAA liaison officer project

- recognition of the significant growth and range of approaches and arrangements
- recognised the need to restrict the scope of the survey
- need to establish the contents of any guidance and any suggested revisions to sections of the *Code*
- liaison officer schemes provided opportunity to survey institutions and HEA subject centres

Employer responsive provision

Scope of the survey

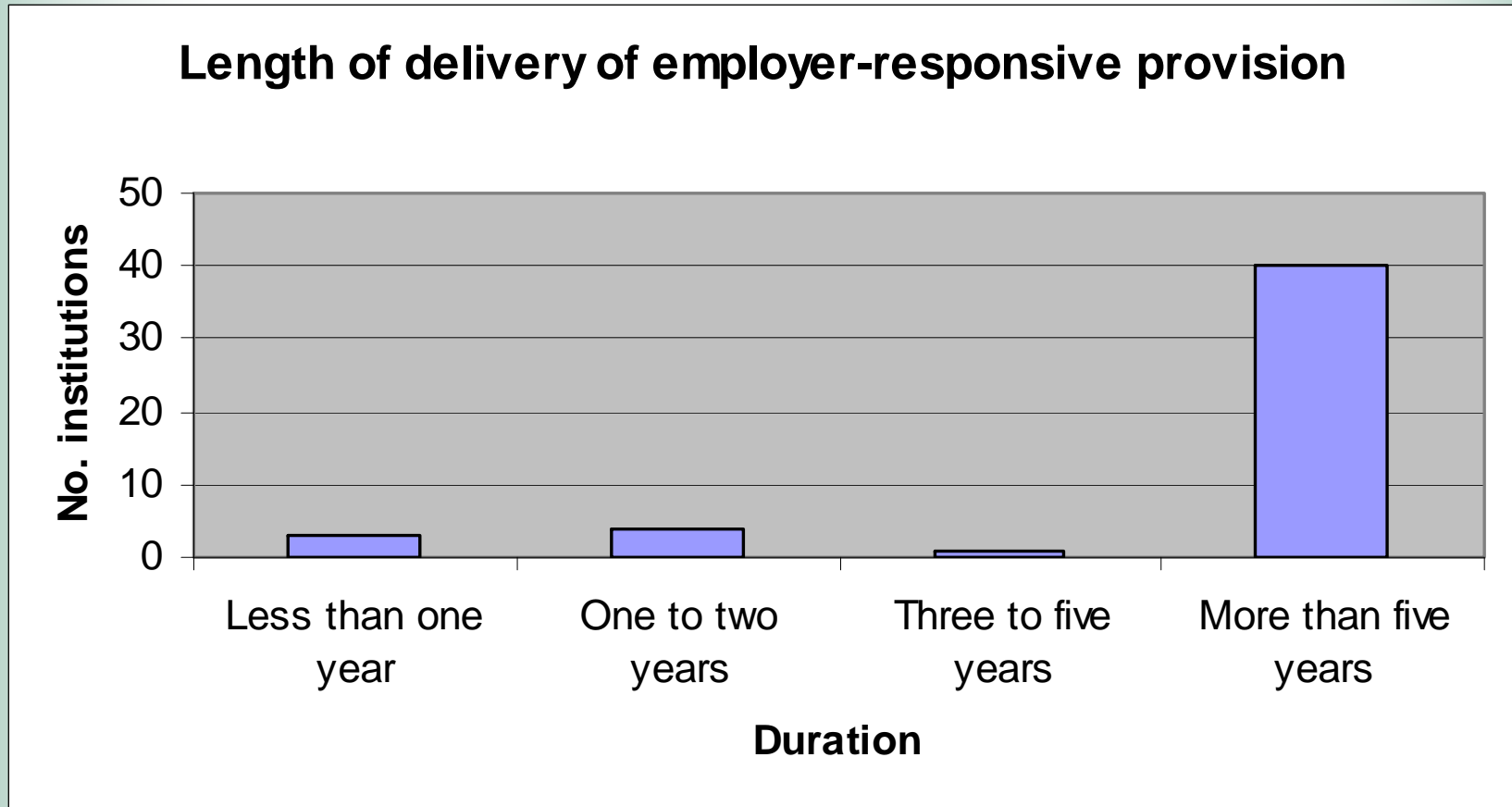
“Employer responsive provision, however, involves more in-depth work with employers and the delivery of bespoke solutions (whether for an individual employer or a sector). It involves a shift away from mainstream provision of the traditional three year full time undergraduate to one where the HEI responds to the needs of the employer in a variety of ways”

- employer involvement in the design and delivery of programmes
- the development of (small unit) credit-based learning opportunities
- employer involvement in assessment.

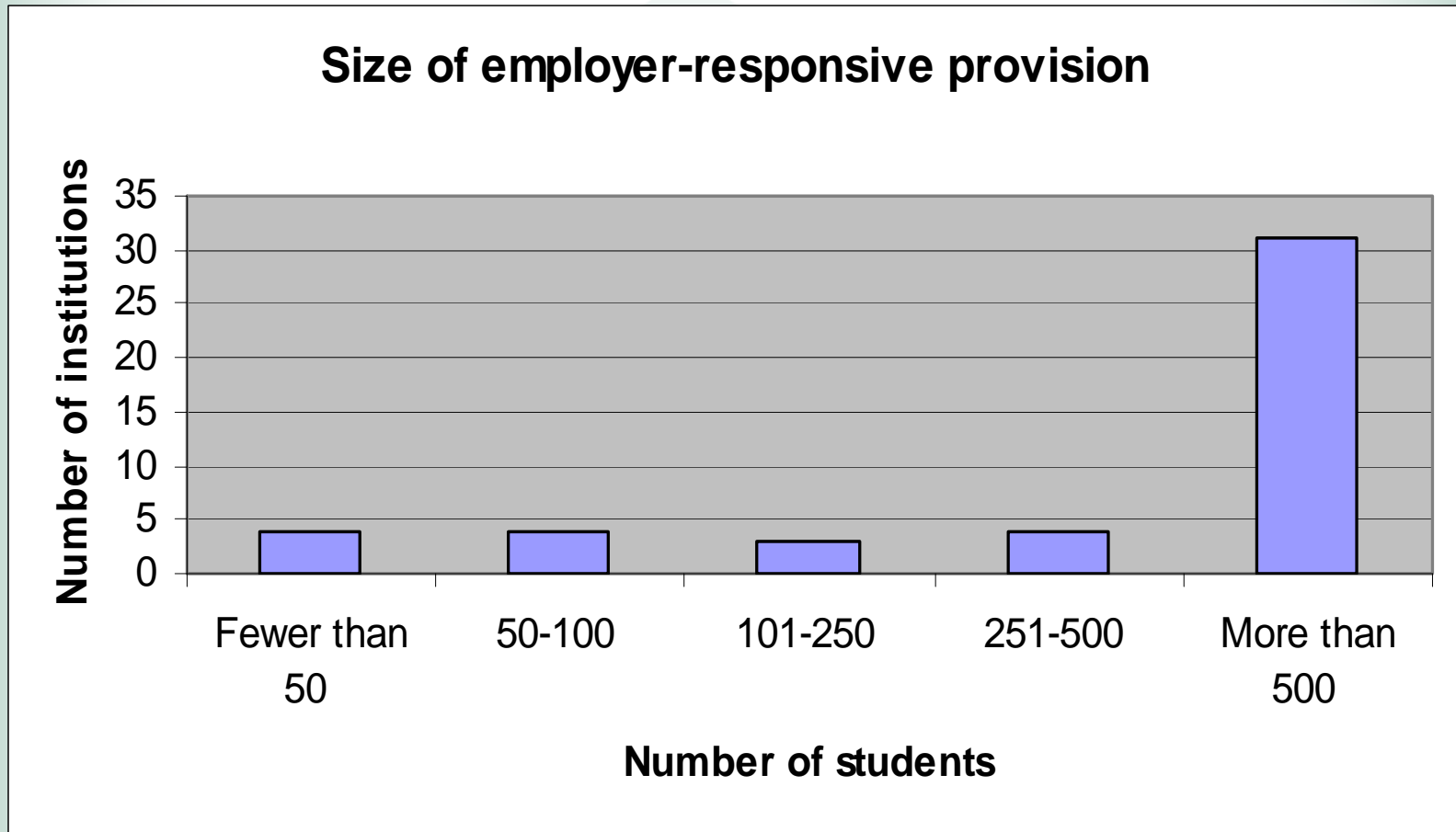
Employer-responsive provision Key survey findings

Dr Mandy Nelson
QAA

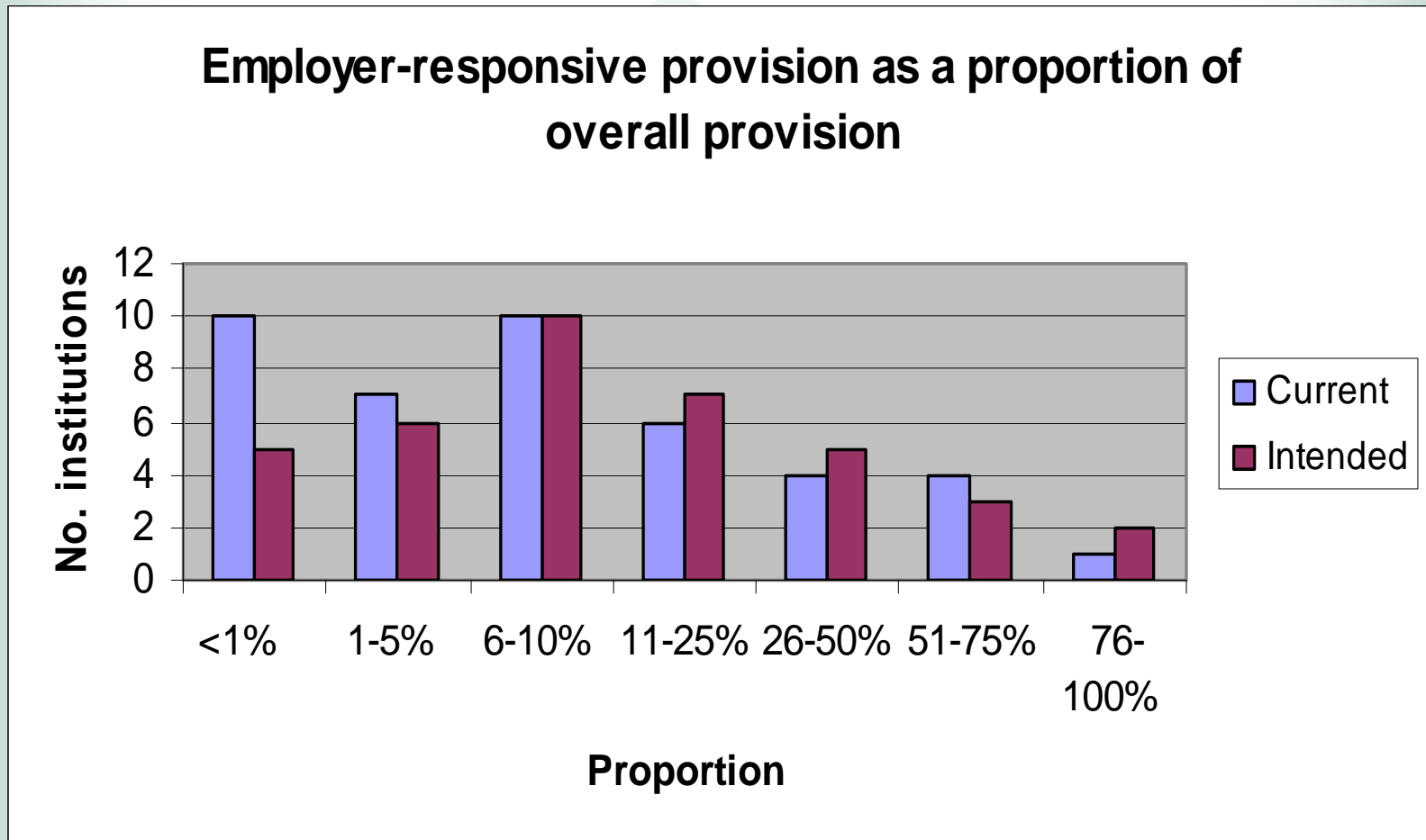
Characteristics of provision (1)



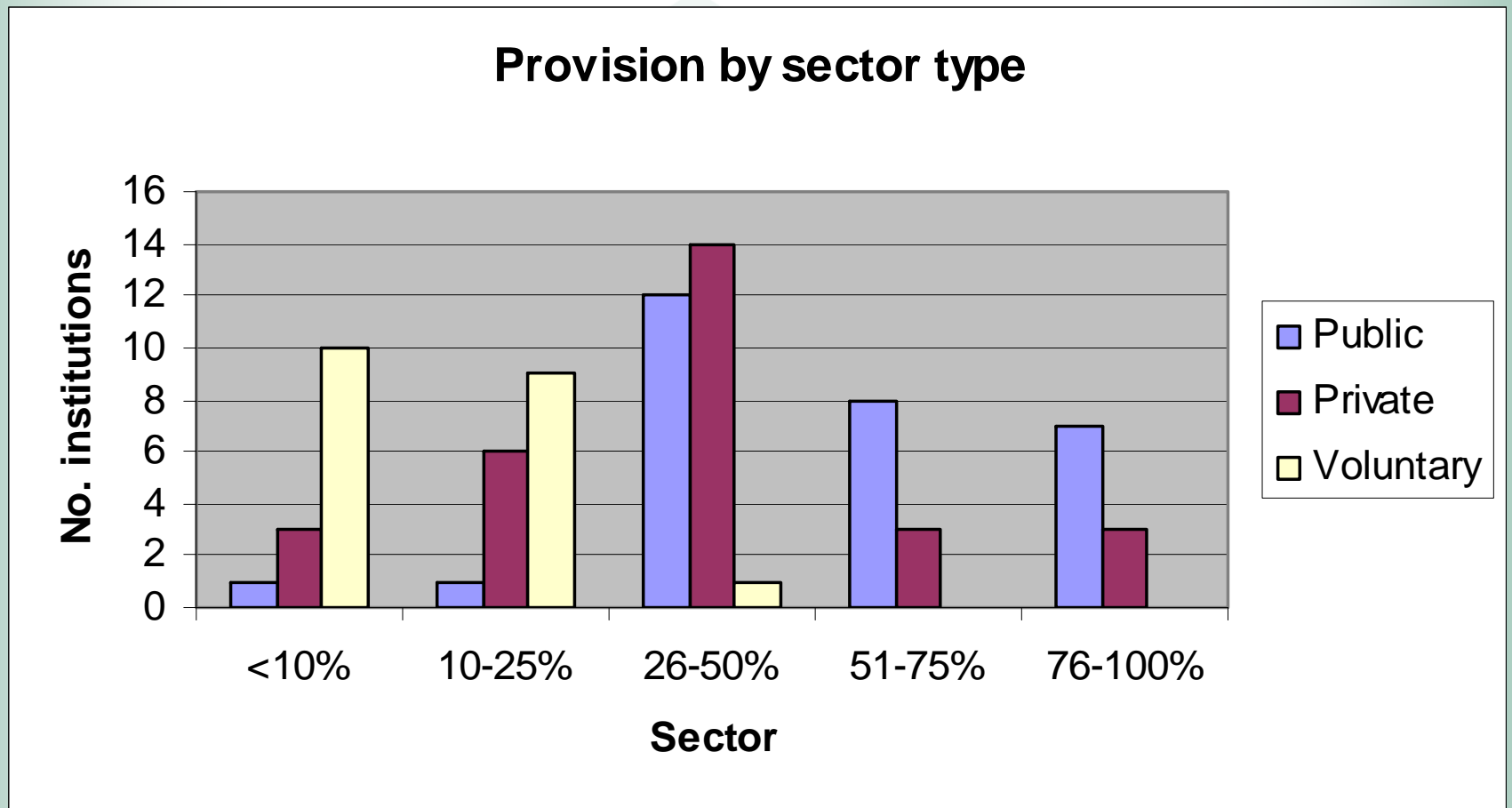
Characteristics of provision (2)



Characteristics of provision (3)



Characteristics of provision (4)



Survey findings

- definition of employer-responsive provision
- quality assurance processes
- structures and systems
- curriculum design, delivery and assessment
- use of external reference points
- sustainability of provision and risk management.

Quality assurance processes

- 31 institutions had adopted strategies to facilitate the quality assurance of employer-responsive provision
- 23 institutions had adopted new processes to facilitate the quality assurance of employer-responsive provision
- 27 respondents considered that the quality assurance of employer-responsive provision should **not** be different from that which applies to the 'traditional' higher education offer.

Changes in structures

- 33 institutions had put new structures in place to accommodate employer-responsive provision
- Examples:
 - introduction of bite-sized modules
 - new committee structures
 - revisions to the APEL guidance
 - shorter validation processes.

Curriculum design and delivery

- 11 respondents reported that in relation to employer-responsive provision, employers were involved in the design, validation, delivery and/or assessment of provision
- 22 respondents indicated that the structure of qualifications had changed.

Sustainability: risks

- risks associated with employer-responsive provision are less easily managed than those associated with more traditional provision
- ‘The distance of the learning from the institution carries additional risk, as does the involvement of employers. Also, content is often distant from traditional subject areas and traditional academic study.’
- ‘Operating off-site and in an environment where the structures supporting ‘on campus’ students are not so readily available is inherently more risky and it takes time to embed processes, but that is not a reason not to do it.’

Risk

- employer-responsive provision tends to result in a diversity of courses and learners spread over a variety of sites
- courses tend to be short term but have significant development costs and the provision is generally very resource intensive from institutions' perspective
- financial volatility - partners may pull out from an arrangement at short notice or the market for a particular skill might disappear, resulting in a low or lack of return on investment.

Risk management

- use of contracts
- development of exit strategies
- monitoring
- development of core or SHELL modules
- flexibility
- communication.

‘The risks are mitigated to some extent by the development of core/shell modules. The philosophy is ‘don’t put all your eggs in one basket’ and the approach is not to deal with SMEs on a one-to-one basis, but to develop an offering suitable (with tweaking) for many companies’.

Results of discussions with the HEA Subject Centres



Dr Richard Brown
Development Officer
Development and Enhancement Group

Results of discussions with the HEA Subject Centres

- QAA runs a liaison scheme with the HEA subject centres
- Responses from 11 subject centres
- 3 humanities subjects
- 5 'applied' subjects and
- 3 health related subjects.

Humanities subjects

- Little in the way of employer-responsive provision in these areas
- Few clear or obvious progression routes to particular employers for most graduates
- Who are the appropriate employers/employers' bodies?
- Employer engagement nonetheless important

'Applied' and health subjects

- Applied nature of these subjects means that employer-responsive provision is an essential part of the landscape
- Interaction can be through PSRBs as well as individual employers
- Many employers are public rather than private sector

Frameworks and approval

It is important that:

- quality frameworks allow for as much flexibility as possible
- frameworks align with the requirements of PSRBs
- programme approval provides a timely response

Assessment in employer-responsive provision

Assessment

- What is assessed? Academic standards or professional competencies?
- How is it assessed? How appropriate is the assessment regime to employer-responsive provision and work-based learning?
- Who does the assessment? Where employers contribute to assessment are they properly supervised and aided?

External examiners

Challenges around

- ensuring that practice-based assessments can be properly scrutinised by external examiners and examination boards
- ensuring that external examiners (and academics generally) have enough up-to-date knowledge about what is going on