



Department for
**Employment
and Learning**
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Terms of reference for the Quality in Higher Education Group (revised Jan 2012)

The purpose of the Quality in Higher Education Group is to promote a quality assurance system for higher education in England and Northern Ireland which is accountable, rigorous, transparent, flexible, responsive, enhancement-led and public facing. Such a system should balance and respond to the needs of a wide variety of stakeholders, including students, prospective students, employers, HE and FE institutions, professional bodies, funders and others. The Group will support the sponsoring bodies (UUK, GuildHE, HEFCE, DEL NI) in working with others, including the QAA and NUS, to ensure that such a system is in place.

The group will have the following remit:

1. To take a strategic overview of the quality assurance system in England and NI, with reference to the principles and objectives for this system published in HEFCE 2010/17 and attached at Annex A.
2. To consider how the quality assurance system might best protect and support the enhancement of the student learning experience.
3. To bring together, inform and be informed by relevant reviews of the quality assurance system.
4. To make proposals regarding the development of the quality assurance system in England and NI¹.

For substantive changes, the group will recommend a course of action to the Boards of the sponsoring bodies, including any arrangements for consultation as necessary.

For minor changes, the group will have delegated authority from the sponsoring bodies to ask the relevant organisation to take the changes forward.

5. To consider Government or other stakeholder suggestions for improvements to the quality assurance system, and make recommendations to the sponsoring bodies accordingly.

¹ According to a protocol to be agreed by the Boards of the sponsoring bodies, and published in Spring 2011.

6. To provide regular updates, and recommendations or advice where appropriate (including proposals for further work, if necessary), to the Boards/Executives of the sponsoring bodies, via the secretariat.
7. To consider carefully the cost and burden implications of any proposals, including through liaison with the Higher Education Better Regulation Group to ensure that proposals meet requirements for effective regulation.
8. To join other bodies and groups in advising on, clarifying and explaining the Quality Assurance System to wider audiences, including through publicising its own work, as far as possible using sponsoring and stakeholder bodies' publication methods and those of the QAA.
9. To keep its Terms of Reference under annual review.

It will be jointly secretaried and owned by the sponsoring bodies: UUK, GuildHE, HEFCE and DELNI. It is intended to be a standing group, not time-limited.

Scope

The Quality Assurance System (QAS) is defined as:

- Institutional review and collaborative provision audits *
- Integrated Quality Enhancement and Review *
- Public information on teaching quality (including National Student Survey)
- Institutions' own internal quality assurance processes
- Academic Infrastructure
- External Examining Arrangements
- QAA procedure for investigating concerns about standards and quality (England, NI, Wales)
- HEFCE Policy on unsatisfactory quality (HEFCE 2009/31) (England)

(* indicates processes which are England and NI only).

The QAS is complemented by the work of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for HE and the Higher Education Academy, as well as more than 50 professional, statutory and regulatory bodies. The QAS is also complemented by the UK Professional Standards Framework, introduced to the sector by the HEA on behalf of the four UK funding Councils and Universities UK and GuildHE. The Group will consider the synergies between the QAS and the work of other bodies, to ensure that the institutional audit method complements and avoids duplication wherever possible.

The Group will focus in particular on England and NI, but will have due regard for processes which are cross-UK. Where it wishes to make a proposal for England and NI which concerns a structure or

system which is UK-wide, or where its proposal may have UK-wide ramifications, it will ensure that the proposal is fully discussed with Scottish and Welsh colleagues. Any agreement would need to involve alternative fora and could not be made unilaterally by this Group.

The Group's work will focus in particular on HEFCE and DELNI-funded taught provision (whether at UG or PG level), wherever it is delivered (including HE in FE colleges). The Group will have regard for the different purposes of the quality assurance system including: quality assurance, quality enhancement and the provision of public information.

The Group will not attempt to manage the work of the various reviews referred to at point 3 of the remit, as these already have (or will already have) their own distinct governance processes in place. Rather the Group will enable the sponsor bodies to see the reviews as part of a whole, feed into them in a more co-ordinated way and enable synergies between them.

Membership as at January 2012

Position	Name
Chair	Philip Jones, Vice-Chancellor, Sheffield Hallam University
Association of Colleges nominee	Clive Turner, Head of Higher Education, City College Norwich
Chair of Academic Registrar Council's Quality Practitioners' Group	Ros Boyne, Academic Registrar, Birmingham City University
DELNI nominee	Denise McAlister, PVC (Learning and Teaching), University of Ulster
GuildHE nominee	Professor Philip Esler, Principal of St Mary's University College Twickenham
HE Academy Chief Executive	Craig Mahoney, Chief Executive
HEFCE nominee - Chair of Higher Education Public Information Steering Group	Janet Beer, Vice-Chancellor, Oxford Brookes University
HEFCE nominee - Chair of the HEFCE strategic committee for Teaching, Quality and the Student Experience	Ruth Farwell, VC, Buckinghamshire New University
HEFCE Director for Education and Participation	Heather Fry
NUS nominees	Usman Ali, NEC, University of Salford
	Alex Bols, Head of Education and Quality, NUS
Pre-HE sector representative	John Morgan, President of the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL)
PSRB representative	Matthew Harrison, Director: Education Programmes, Royal Academy of Engineering
QAA Chief Executive	Anthony McClaran, Chief Executive
QAA nominee	Sir Rodney Brooke, Chair of the QAA Board
Quality Strategy Network nominee	Ian Robinson, Dean of Quality Enhancement, Edge Hill University
UUK nominees	Joy Carter, VC, University of Winchester
	Saul Tendler, PVC, University of Nottingham

Observers

AoC	Nick Davy
BIS	Bev Thomas
HEFCW	Cliona O'Neill
SFC	Lesley Sutherland

Secretariat

DELNI	Helen Gartley
HEFCE	Tish Bourke
GuildHE	Helen Bowles
UUK	Greg Wade

Members will serve for three years in the first instance, with an option of reappointment for a further three years. ²

Practicalities

The Group should meet at least three times per year, but will also operate by correspondence. Meeting dates will be canvassed with a choice of dates where timetables permit. Where a member is unable to attend a meeting and would like to nominate an alternate, this will be at the discretion of the chair (applications should be made through the secretariat). All observers will be invited to every meeting of the Group.

The Group will operate transparently, including through publishing minutes and papers on a dedicated web page³. In order to ensure that the Group is fully informed by a wide range of expertise, time-limited sub-groups or one-off meetings of interested parties may be set up.

² Where an individual changes role, the nominating body (or sponsoring bodies, where relevant) will have the option to nominate a different person.

³ In order to avoid confusion, the Group will not publish as a matter of course papers containing drafts of documents intended for future publication.

Annex A

Principles and objectives for quality assurance in England and Northern Ireland

The system to assure quality and standards should:

a. Provide authoritative, publicly accessible information on academic quality and standards in higher education.

- i Provide timely and readily accessible public information, on a consistent and comparable basis, on the quality and standards of the educational provision for which each institution takes responsibility.
- ii Report results on a robust, consistent and comparable basis that meets public expectations.

b. Command public, employer and other stakeholder confidence.

- i Ensure that any provision that falls below national expectations can be detected and the issues speedily addressed.
- ii Apply transparent processes and judgements, and function in a rigorous, intelligible, proportionate and responsive way.
- iii Assure the threshold standards of awards from higher education institutions in England and Northern Ireland, wherever and however they are delivered.
- iv Explain clearly where responsibilities lie for the quality and standards of provision and how they are secured.

c. Meet the needs of the funding bodies and of institutions.

- i Enable the funding bodies to discharge their statutory responsibilities to assure the quality of the programmes they fund.
- ii Recognise the role of institutions as independent autonomous bodies responsible for their own quality management systems and for the standards of awards made in their name.
- iii Enable institutions to discharge their corporate responsibilities, by providing them with information on how well their own internal systems for quality management and setting and maintaining standards are functioning, and identifying areas for improvement.
- iv Where relevant, recognise the role of employers as co-deliverers of higher education, taking the quality assurance requirements of such provision into account.

d. Meet the relevant needs of all students.

- i Have current and prospective students' interests at its heart, underlying all of the other principles.

- ii Engage students in the quality process, whether at course, institutional or national level.
- iii Focus on the enhancement of the students' learning experiences without compromising the accountability element of quality assurance.

e. Rely on robust evidence-based independent judgement.

- i Incorporate external reviews run by an operationally independent body (the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education) and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies.
- ii Incorporate evidence from institutions' own internal quality assurance processes, including those which involve external participants.
- iii Recognise and support the important role of external examining.

f. Support a culture of quality enhancement within institutions.

- i Apply a process of external review, both by academic peers and by students, rather than inspection by a professional inspectorate.
- ii Include processes based on rigorous institutional self-evaluation.
- iii Promote quality enhancement in institutions.
- iv Enable the dissemination of good practice.

g. Work effectively and efficiently.

- i Operate efficiently, in order to avoid disproportionate use of institutional effort and resources which could otherwise be directed to the delivery of frontline student teaching.
- ii Rely on partnership and co-operation between the institutions, Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education and the funding bodies.
- iii Address both quality (appropriate and effective teaching, support, assessment and opportunities for learning provided for students) and standards (levels of achievement that a student has to reach to gain an award) as two distinct but interlinked concepts.
- iv Work on the principle of collecting information once to use in many ways.
- v Acknowledge that while the quality assurance system applies to England and Northern Ireland only, it is underpinned by reference tools that are UK-wide.
- vi Adhere to the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (encompassing internal and external quality assurance).
- vii Maintain sufficient flexibility and responsiveness to meet changing demands and public priorities in a timely manner.

viii Complement and avoid duplication with, so far as possible, other assurance processes in higher education (for example Ofsted; professional, statutory and regulatory bodies).