

# ***Annual review***

2005-06

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# Foreword

This review of 2005-06 offers a taste of our work at the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). To reflect QAA's *Strategic plan 2006-11*, launched in spring 2006, the *Annual review* is structured in line with the five strategic themes that will provide a structure to shape and inform our work over the next five years.

Our core activity is to review and report on standards and quality in the United Kingdom's (UK's) higher education institutions (HEIs) and to help them improve and enhance their performance. The range of review methods and the numbers of reviews conducted reflect the rich diversity of academic environments and the unique needs of institutions across the UK.

It is testament to the commitment of universities and colleges that most of what we have found is of a high standard and quality. That does not mean that the institutions can rest on their laurels. In the ever-shifting landscape of higher education, with its increasing demands, individual institutions are still responsible for their own standards and quality, and need to protect and secure these with continuous care and attention.

With their assistance, QAA continues to support and maintain the Academic Infrastructure - the common framework which helps to define higher education across the UK. We have hosted many events, bringing together representatives from across the sector to listen to and discuss their changing needs. As a result we are reviewing and revising its components, to the benefit of all.

We have developed and integrated new methods of review. Our review of postgraduate research degree programmes in England, Wales and Northern Ireland was completed during the year and is now an integral part of the revised institutional review methods which will be introduced in 2007.

On the international front, we are proud that overseas organisations want to tap into our expertise. We have provided opportunities for them to learn about our work, and we ourselves participated in key European and other international forums.

We also signed the Concordat of English higher education regulatory bodies, which resulted from the work of the Higher Education Regulation Review Group (HERRG). In doing so we showed our commitment to better regulation and risk-based intervention.

As QAA enters its tenth year, we shall be looking ahead to see what quality assurance might mean to the sector over the next decade and ensure that our portfolio of work evolves to provide assurance, information and enhancement for all our stakeholders. At the heart of everything we do is our mission to safeguard the quality and standards of higher education for employers, for regulatory bodies and, most importantly of all, for students and staff in HEIs.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam Younger". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large 'S' and 'Y'.

Sam Younger  
Chairman



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Peter Williams". The signature is cursive and elegant.

Peter Williams  
Chief Executive

# Our activity in 2005-06

QAA is a UK-wide organisation and provides quality assurance services to higher education institutions in each country. Between 1 August 2005 and 31 July 2006 we undertook the following reviews:

- 12 institutional audits in England and Northern Ireland, of which 11 were given a judgement of broad confidence and one was given a judgement of no confidence. This completed the audit cycle for the transitional period 2002-05
- two combined institutional reviews/degree awarding powers scrutinies in Wales
- six enhancement-led institutional reviews in Scotland
- 31 applications under consideration for degree awarding powers and/or university title and 10 recommendations made to governments
- 21 collaborative provision audits in England: 95 features of good practice were identified and one was given a judgement of limited confidence
- 124 reviews of postgraduate research degree programmes in England, Wales and Northern Ireland
- 34 academic reviews of higher education in further education colleges in England, leading to 31 judgements of broad confidence, one of limited confidence and two of no confidence
- seven academic reviews at subject-level in Scotland, all receiving a judgement of broad confidence
- three Foundation Degree reviews in England, to complete the programme, started in 2004-05, leading to one judgement of no confidence in learning opportunities
- 42 Major Reviews of NHS-funded healthcare education. This completed the contracted programme of Major Review activity

- eight reviews in schools of osteopathy on behalf of the General Osteopathic Council
- two Authorised Validating Agency reviews were undertaken for Access to Higher Education and four new licence applications were processed

- 47 institutions participated in the special review of Teaching Quality Information. The outcomes have been published in an overview report
- 10 overseas audits of UK higher education in the People's Republic of China.

## In addition, we organised and were involved in many other activities. We:

- developed and consulted on a revised institutional audit method in England and Northern Ireland
- hosted the second Enhancement Themes conference in Scotland, attended by 300 delegates
- held nine round table discussions on the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*, attended by over 500 delegates
- held eight QAA regional seminars, with over 350 delegates, on various aspects of the development and implementation of the Academic Infrastructure
- signed Memoranda of Understanding with the Higher Education and Training Awards Council of Ireland, and with the Institution for Engineering and Technology, to establish closer working relations with each organisation and work towards rationalising regulation
- hosted a conference on Securing and maintaining academic standards: benchmarking M level programmes, attended by 105 delegates
- hosted the Working together conference, between officers of QAA and representatives of the Higher Education Academy Subject Centres
- hosted the second annual Liaison Conference between QAA and HEIs, focusing on how the *Outcomes from institutional audit* papers inform quality management and learning support arrangements in institutions
- hosted the European Bachelor's and Master's Conference
- organised a European conference on the language of quality assurance
- organised jointly, with the National Union of Students and the Association of Managers in Student Unions, two Quality Takes Time seminars
- received 60 parties of international visitors from 30 countries
- gave presentations at conferences in 19 countries.

# QAA 1997-2006

Much has changed in the higher education sector since QAA was established in 1997. The last 10 years have seen us develop, implement and adapt a wide range of innovative review and audit processes for a variety of clients. Our methods have been regularly revised and updated to accommodate the changing climate and the diverse needs of the devolved nations of the UK.

QAA Scotland has worked closely with the Scottish Executive and Scottish Funding Council to develop the Quality Enhancement Framework that reflects the distinctive needs of higher education in Scotland. We have cultivated an approach that provides strong evidence of the quality and standards of our HEIs. This has meant a shift over time in the nature of our work, with greater emphasis on quality enhancement.

The Academic Infrastructure, which QAA developed in partnership with the sector and continues to maintain, evolved from recommendations in the reports of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education and its Scottish Committee (*Dearing and Garrick reports*).

Today the Academic Infrastructure provides a means of describing academic standards in higher education, allowing for the diversity and innovation that make up the higher education experience in the UK.

Over the years, we have worked with professional bodies to extend our capabilities and share information. We have built an extensive body of knowledge and high level of expertise, becoming a major source of advice and intelligence on the management of standards and quality in higher education. We are proud that our work is seen as a fundamental component in safeguarding the academic standards and quality of UK higher education.



High-volume subject review began to be superseded by other methods in 2001. We were able to use the valuable experience gained from this process to develop programmes to meet the review needs of a greater variety of external stakeholders and partners. For example, in healthcare disciplines, we satisfied the requirements of several professional and statutory bodies through the Major Review process. This, in turn, helped to reduce the regulatory burden. We believe that the more the needs of regulatory bodies are met through our work, the more effective and proportionate the overall regulatory framework for higher education will become. The HERRG Concordat places us as the major authority for external regulation in higher education.

The transnational dimension of our work has become progressively more important over the last decade, and we are now widely regarded as being at the forefront of quality assurance internationally. We play a vital role in promoting UK interests for the benefit of the whole higher education sector throughout the world. With an increasing participatory role in the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), we have been fully involved in the development of European quality standards and guidelines.

# Safeguarding standards

At the heart of QAA's role in safeguarding standards of higher education is our range of programmes of review. These processes reflect the changes in higher education and take into account the diversity of our stakeholders' needs in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

We conducted over 300 reviews across all review methods in the UK.

As part of our continuing commitment to renewing and updating our review methods, we completed the development of a revised institutional audit method for England and Northern Ireland. This has been done in the light of the Quality Assurance Framework Review Group (Burslem Group) report published in July 2005. Implementation begins in 2006-07.

In Scotland we have continued to fine-tune enhancement-led institutional review (ELIR) in the light of both our own monitoring and the positive reports from the external evaluation team at the University of Lancaster and the Open University.

In Wales, two combined institutional reviews and degree awarding powers (DAP) scrutinies were completed during the year. Both of these resulted in confidence judgements in the soundness of the institution's current and likely future management of the quality of academic programmes and the academic standards of awards.

There were 31 applications for DAP and/or university title under consideration, including one for taught DAP and one for university title in Scotland. We put forward recommendations, under the Government's new (2004) criteria for England and Wales, in respect of 10 applications, including the first example of a successful wholly privately funded applicant. In each case, our advice was accepted.

In England, Wales and Northern Ireland we completed a review of postgraduate research degree programmes (RDPs) in every institution, ahead of incorporating postgraduate RDPs into the institutional audit and review methods.

The overall framework for the Access to Higher Education scheme in England and Wales has been renewed, including a new method for reviewing Authorised Validating Agencies (AVAs) and for licensing new AVA regional structures. The Access to Higher Education logo has now been trademarked. We processed four new licence applications for recognition as an AVA and completed two AVA reviews.

We undertook 34 academic reviews of higher education programmes directly funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England in further education colleges in England. During the period we also began to develop a new method of review - integrated quality and enhancement review (IQER). We published a draft handbook in April, to inform the piloting of IQER in England in 2006-07.

We continued the programme of Major Review and completed subject benchmarking under contract with

the Department of Health in England, in partnership with Skills for Health, the Strategic Health Authorities, the Health Professions Council, the Nursing and Midwifery Council and the Workforce Development Confederations. We also carried out the pilot monitoring of Ongoing Quality and Monitoring Enhancement, part of the Partnership Quality Assurance Framework for Healthcare Education.

Through our contract with the General Osteopathic Council we carried out five renewal reviews and three monitoring reviews in schools of osteopathy in England.

HEIs across the UK are generally providing a good quality higher education, playing to their different strengths. They are maintaining their academic standards in the face of the increasing variability of student entry qualifications, and so are meeting one of the biggest challenges of wider participation. However, the standards of degrees need to be appropriate, and may have to change to meet society's own developing expectations of higher education.

# Supporting and enhancing quality

QAA is committed to its responsibility as steward of the Academic Infrastructure, the UK's framework for academic standards. We share the knowledge and expertise we have gathered to help institutions to improve their own practice with regard to quality and standards. We encourage strong student involvement in our review methods to reflect the learner perspective.

We completed the revision of three of the 10 sections in the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)* and started the consultation process to address updates of further sections.

Working closely with the sector, we have, to date, published over 70 subject benchmark statements which set out expectations about standards of degrees in a range of subject areas. Three new and 17 revised subject benchmark statements were consulted on this year.

In Scotland, our work on the Enhancement Themes programme continued to be planned and directed through the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee.

The Enhancement Themes initiative supports institutions and student bodies in enhancing the student learning experience by exploring and researching good practice in specific areas, as identified by the sector. The Themes for this year were The First Year, Flexible Delivery and Integrative Assessment. The Enhancement Themes website was launched in October and the second Annual Enhancement Themes Conference was held in January.

During the year, we undertook a series of informal consultations on the further development and enhancement of programme specifications. The project culminated in the publication of the revised *Guidelines on preparing programme specifications* in July.

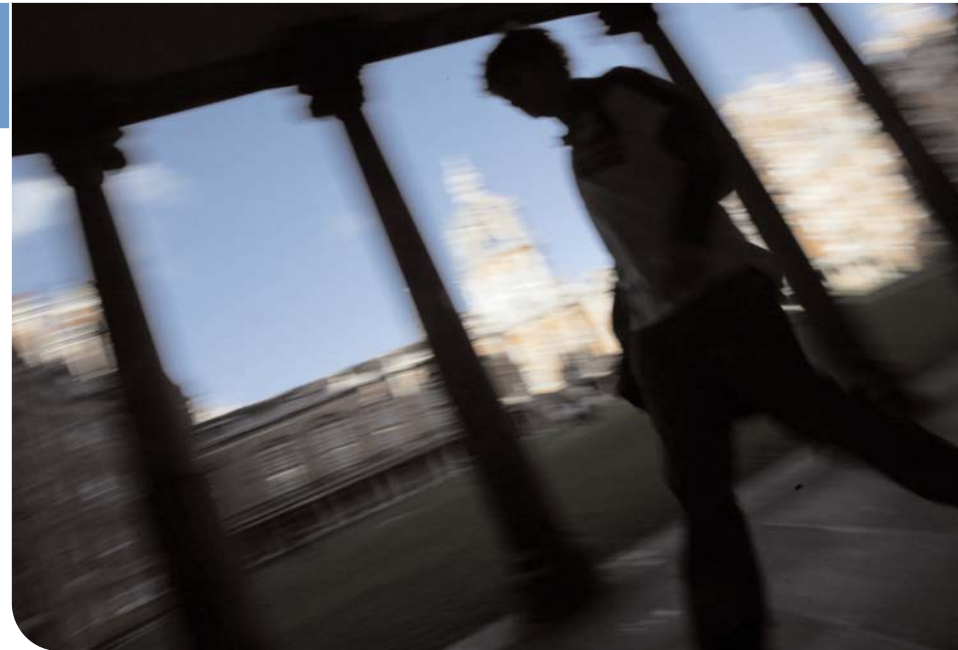
We chose specific themes from the findings in our institutional audit reports and analysed the results. From this information we published a further 12 reports in the *Outcomes from institutional audit* series, allowing us to provide focused feedback and intelligence to universities and colleges.

QAA and the Higher Education Academy (HEA) have established productive working relations and a programme of joint projects. Our Chief Executive and his counterpart at HEA attended the Board meetings of each other's organisations as observers.

In England, we continued to be involved in training for the National Union of Students' (NUS) sabbatical officers. Regular meetings were held by the Higher Education Quality Steering Group, which has members from QAA, NUS and the Association for Managers in Student Unions, including the twice-yearly Quality Takes Time conference. These events incorporated presentations and workshops and have proved to be productive and informative.

In conjunction with NUS Wales, we held a briefing event in Wales introducing students to the method of institutional review, explaining how they are involved in the process and offering guidance for officers completing the students' written submission.

QAA Scotland supports student participation in quality scotland (sparqs). We continued to train students to play a full part on our ELIR review teams, and each team included a student member.



One of the ultimate aims of quality assurance is to embed the principle of improvement and enhancement into the heart of HEIs' academic cultures. There is still much work to be done, but evidence suggests that real progress has been made, especially in Scotland, in focusing on the enhancement of quality. Students are put firmly at the centre of our activities in the UK.

# Offering expertise

QAA adapts the services we provide in response to the changing demands of our diverse portfolio of clients. We work to understand the needs of all our partners, including institutions and students, employers, professional, statutory and regulatory bodies, and take an active role in providing them with appropriate information, expertise and support.

A series of round table events provided opportunities for HEIs, their representative bodies and other public bodies to discuss and consider key issues concerning the higher education sector. These included the maintenance and updating of the *Code of practice* and other elements of the Academic Infrastructure.

We worked with the Burgess Steering Group in the development of an academic credit scheme for higher education in England.

Throughout the year, we reinforced our links with employers. This was achieved through liaison with organisations such as the UK Inter-Professional Group, Confederation of British Industry, Institute of Directors, Engineering Council UK, the regional development agencies and the sector skills councils.

We encouraged employer involvement in working groups and round table discussion meetings. We also worked closely with The Council for Industry and Higher Education and other organisations with business/education interests, including Foundation Degree Forward and Manchester Enterprises.

Through the liaison officer scheme, we continued our mission to support HEIs' work to improve their own management of quality and standards. All HEIs that have elected to be part of the scheme had at least one communication during the year. The second, very successful, liaison conference was held in May.

QAA consolidated its work with NUS and other student bodies in the UK. We recognise the importance of students taking part in reviews at institutional level and continued to promote ways to increase their opportunities to participate as stakeholders in the quality assurance of higher education.

In Scotland, students have been fully involved in the planning and execution of the Enhancement Themes through membership of all theme steering committees and working groups. In addition, we ran a series of workshops, in conjunction with sparqs, dealing with the role of students in contributing to quality enhancement and the outcomes of the Enhancement Themes.

QAA receives many requests to participate in projects in the UK and overseas, but we have only had limited capacity to engage in this work. During the year we strengthened our capability to manage a wider range of contract business, including work with regulatory bodies.

HEIs have developed considerable expertise in assuring their quality and standards, but are not yet so good at sharing practice across the academic community. QAA has invested a significant amount of time and effort in bringing practitioners together to discuss the management of quality and standards and in disseminating the rich seams of information that lie within its review reports.

# Rationalising regulation

By working together and sharing information with the many regulators of higher education, QAA promotes the principles and practices of good regulation. We help to develop review methods that are effective while easing the pressure of regulation for institutions.

In May, QAA signed the Concordat prepared by HERRG as part of our commitment to rationalising regulation in higher education. In common with all the signatory bodies to the Concordat, QAA has added its own 'Annex' setting out its intentions and targets for better regulation over the next couple of years.

We signed the Healthcare Commission Concordat as an associate signatory in March. The Concordat provides a set of objectives and underpinning practices that aim to reduce the burden of inspection on staff providing healthcare in England. It specifies exactly what organisations can expect from bodies that inspect, regulate and audit healthcare.

We signed our first Memorandum of Understanding with a professional body - the Institution for Engineering and Technology - to establish a framework for collaborative work. We continued to work closely with Ofsted and the Adult Learning Inspectorate to ensure that demands on further education colleges were proportionate and necessary. We consulted on a revised method for review of higher education in further education colleges, and piloting will take place in 2006-07.

QAA Scotland contributes fully to the work of the Quality Working Group (QWG), a national body with representatives from the Scottish Funding Council, NUS Scotland,



Universities Scotland and QAA Scotland. By participating in the work of QWG, we ensure that our work in Scotland remains effective and fit for purpose.

QAA Scotland is one of five partners that manage the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), bringing together all quality assured Scottish qualifications into a single, integrated framework. The SCQF partners agreed in 2006 to put the SCQF on a more formal and firm constitutional footing and it was agreed to form a limited company.

It is sensible to make the regulation of higher education more efficient, and not to do more than is necessary to meet the needs of students, institutions and, more widely, society. However, a reduction in the level of preventive maintenance for all is more likely to lead to serious failure by a few. The balance between protection and burden has to be struck with care. QAA's designation by HERRG as the lead body for quality assurance in higher education offers a sound way forward.

# Working worldwide

QAA takes a leading role in international developments in relation to standards and quality, on behalf of the higher education sector and UK governments. We enjoy a close relationship with international quality assurance agencies, monitoring and reporting on advances overseas.

International work continued to grow in importance during the year, and we briefed the sector and partner bodies on European and other international developments. QAA played an active part in the development of the European Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance in higher education.

Our Chief Executive was elected as President of ENQA in September 2005 and we have been closely involved in the ENQA programme of Transnational European Evaluation Projects, which was completed in May. We hosted two workshops for ENQA: the first, The improvement and development of evaluation methodologies and the second, The language of quality assurance.

We carried out a survey of UK collaborative links with the People's Republic of China. Full audits were carried out in 10 UK institutions, and our audit teams visited their Chinese partners in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou.

We completed a programme of transnational review work involving chemistry departments in the UK and Denmark, with the involvement of the Royal Society of Chemistry.

In March we organised the second Colloquium on joint degrees, providing a forum for institutions to share their views and discuss the quality aspects of working in partnership or in consortia leading to joint or dual awards,

both nationally and internationally. We also organised a discussion about quality assurance in higher education with delegates at the European Union Presidency Conference in Manchester in October.

In June, we signed a new Memorandum of Understanding with the Higher Education and Training Awards Council of Ireland. We were also granted observer status at meetings of the Asia-Pacific Quality Network.

To promote the exchange of expertise and experience we played host to over 60 parties of international visitors from 30 countries. We participated in international conferences, seminars and projects in the following countries: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Chile, Croatia, Egypt, Finland, France, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Hong Kong, India, Japan, The Netherlands, Norway, Saudi Arabia, Serbia and Montenegro, UK and United Arab Emirates (Abu Dhabi).



**The UK now has one of the most international higher education systems in the world. Its quality assurance approaches are world leading. But nothing can be taken for granted: the expectations and requirements of other countries are constantly increasing. We are helping UK institutions to meet the challenges of working worldwide, and making our own contribution to the strengthening of transnational higher education.**

# Financial information

## Statement of financial activities for the year ended 31 July 2006

	2006 £	2005 £
<b>Income and expenditure</b>		
<b>Incoming resources</b>		
<b>Incoming resources from generated funds</b>		
Investment income - bank interest receivable	244,474	232,720
<b>Incoming resources from charitable activities</b>		
Subscriptions	3,622,700	3,608,400
Contracts with higher education funding bodies	4,454,025	5,381,282
Other contracts	2,685,095	2,042,661
Other related income	458,122	267,847
<b>Total incoming resources from charitable activities</b>	<b>11,219,942</b>	<b>11,300,190</b>
<b>Other incoming resources</b>	-	5,329
<b>Total incoming resources</b>	<b>11,464,416</b>	<b>11,538,239</b>

	2006 £	2005 £
<b>Resources expended</b>		
<b>Charitable activities</b>		
Safeguarding standards	5,251,730	6,374,925
Supporting and enhancing quality	1,489,321	1,499,858
Offering expertise	2,922,171	2,586,291
Rationalising regulation	686,221	470,315
Working worldwide	525,531	351,725
<b>Total expenditure on charitable activities</b>	<b>10,874,974</b>	<b>11,283,114</b>
<b>Governance costs</b>	<b>215,799</b>	<b>211,793</b>
<b>Total resources expended</b>	<b>11,090,773</b>	<b>11,494,907</b>
<b>Net income</b>	<b>373,643</b>	<b>43,332</b>
<b>Fund balances brought forward</b>	<b>3,003,706</b>	<b>2,960,374</b>
<b>Fund balances carried forward</b>	<b>3,377,349</b>	<b>3,003,706</b>

## Balance sheet as at 31 July 2006

	2006	2005
	£	£
<b>Fixed assets</b>		
Tangible assets	359,524	336,713
<b>Current assets</b>		
Debtors	1,080,991	993,068
Cash at bank and in hand	3,929,988	3,917,381
	5,010,979	4,910,449
<b>Creditors - amounts falling due within one year</b>	(1,703,154)	(1,953,456)
<b>Net current assets</b>	3,307,825	2,956,993
<b>Total assets less current liabilities</b>	3,667,349	3,293,706
<b>Provisions for liabilities and charges</b>	(290,000)	(290,000)
<b>Net assets</b>	3,377,349	3,003,706
<b>Represented by:</b>		
<b>Unrestricted funds as at 31 July 2006</b>	3,377,349	3,003,706

## Summarised accounts

The *Directors' report and financial statements for the year ended 31 July 2006* was approved by the QAA Board and the company's members at the Annual General Meeting (AGM) held on 30 November 2006. The *Directors' report and financial statements for the year ended 31 July 2006* was submitted to both the Registrar of Companies and the Charity Commission following the AGM.

The summarised accounts contained in this *Annual review* are extracted from the financial statements prepared by QAA and given an unqualified audit opinion by Mazars, QAA's external auditors.

The summarised accounts may not contain sufficient information to allow full understanding of the financial affairs of QAA. For further information, the Directors' report, the full financial statements and the auditors report on those financial statements should be consulted. Copies are available at [www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/corporate.asp](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/corporate.asp) or from the Director of Administration at QAA.

## Statement of external auditors

The summarised accounts contained within this *Annual review* are consistent with the full financial statements produced by QAA for the year ended 31 July 2006 and on which we have given an unqualified opinion dated 17 January 2007.

Mazars  
Chartered Accountants, Registered Auditors

# About QAA

QAA's mission is to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of higher education qualifications and to inform and encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of higher education.

We do this by:

- conducting external reviews in universities and colleges
- describing clear academic standards through the Academic Infrastructure
- advising governments on applications for DAP and university title
- advising on, promoting and enhancing academic standards and quality
- contributing to and influencing international quality assurance.

QAA was established in 1997 and is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee. It is an independent body funded mainly by subscriptions from UK universities and colleges of higher education and contracts with the UK higher education funding bodies and with government departments.

Our full *Directors' report and financial statements for the year ended 31 July 2006* is available at [www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/annualreports](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/annualreports)

A full list of our subscribers can be found at [www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/subscribers.asp](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/subscribers.asp)



# Glossary of terms

**Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI).** The inspectorate for skills, workforce development and preparation for employment.

**Authorised Validating Agency (AVA).** An organisation or consortia licensed to certify, authorise or authenticate Access to higher education programmes of study.

**European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).** Disseminates information, experiences and good practices in the field of quality assurance in higher education to European quality assurance agencies, public authorities and HEIs.

**Higher Education Academy (HEA).** Helps HEIs to provide the best possible learning experience for their students.

**Higher Education Regulation Review Group (HERRG).** Independent regulation review group aiming to rationalise regulatory demands in line with the Government's *Principles of Good Regulation*.

**Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC).** Awards qualifications at all levels of higher education and training up to PhD level outside the university sector in the Republic of Ireland.

**National Union of Students (NUS).** A voluntary membership organisation comprising a confederation of local student representative organisations in colleges and universities throughout the UK and Northern Ireland.

**Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted).** The inspectorate for education provision of children and learners in England.

**Quality Assurance Framework Review Group (Burslem Group).** Set up by the Higher Education Funding Council for England, Universities UK and SCOP (now Guild HE) to review the quality assurance framework for HEIs.

**Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC).** Manages the programme of Enhancement Theme activity.

**Student participation in quality scotland (sparqs).** Funded by the Scottish Funding Council, helps students, students' associations and institutions to improve the effectiveness and engagement in quality assurance and enhancement in institutions across Scotland.

**Teaching Quality Information (TQI).** Gives information about the quality and standards of higher education teaching delivered by universities and colleges in a given subject.

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