



A QAA statement: Quality assurance and the HEFCE priority for higher education learning linked to employer engagement and workforce development

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) is prioritising the promotion of higher education (HE) learning through employer engagement and workforce development. The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's (QAA) interests in these areas centre on the quality assurance of work-based and work-related learning and how higher education institutions (HEIs) assess, accredit, and certificate such learning.

QAA is keen to stress that while it is essential that all UK HE awards meet the relevant standards set out in the Academic Infrastructure¹, irrespective of the way in which learning is achieved and assessed, quality assurance arrangements should be proportionate to risk, relevant, and meet a reasonable 'fitness for purpose' test.

Where an HEI is acting alone in employer-related HE provision, its own quality assurance arrangements will be guided by the relevant components of the Academic Infrastructure. Effective quality assurance does not require that all detailed aspects of the Academic Infrastructure should invariably be included, irrespective of their applicability within particular contexts and to specific situations. For example, in the accreditation of employer-based training it is reasonable to expect that priority will be given to those dimensions of the Academic Infrastructure that have a bearing on academic standards, because these, unlike the quality of learning opportunities, are under the direct control of the awarding body.

There is an increasing emphasis on the delivery of employer-related learning through consortia, such as Lifelong Learning Networks and Skills Pathfinders, with different models emerging for the organisation of such provision. QAA is keen to ensure that, while HEIs continue to identify how confidence in the quality of their programmes and standards of their awards is achieved and demonstrated, they should not over-elaborate their quality assurance procedures.

Where programmes are made up of components (modules or units) that have been validated and assessed by different HEI partners under their own separate arrangements, it is reasonable to expect that a student receiving an HE award will have demonstrated achievement of the overall (programme) learning outcomes required by the awarding institution; but this does not mean that every component that contributes to its award must necessarily be revalidated by the awarding institution.

Each awarding HEI is ultimately responsible for the standard of any award made in its name, and it is for them to decide what evidence they will accept to enable them to determine their general confidence in partners' contributions. Such evidence may include the outcomes of audits and reviews undertaken by external and independent bodies.

QAA will continue to monitor developments in the quality assurance of work-based and work-related learning and will assist the sector, its auditors and reviewers, and key stakeholders by publication of relevant guidance and through a programme of activities that support discussion and dissemination of effective practice in the quality assurance of education achieved through work-based and placement learning.

¹ The Academic Infrastructure provides a set of reference points for establishing and assuring the quality and standards of UK HE programmes and awards (www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure).