



## Inside

- 2 The Reviews Group - Interview with Stephen Jackson
- 5 Institutional audit in England
- 5 Teaching quality information
- 6 Subject-level reviews in HEIs in England
  - Developmental engagements
  - Academic review in HEIs
  - Learning from subject review
- 7 HE in English FECs
  - Academic review of directly-funded FECs
  - HE in FEC Liaison Group and Forum
  - Higher Education Further conference
- 9 Review of Foundation degrees
- 10 Major review of NHS-funded health professions programmes
- 11 Our work in Wales
  - Institutional review
  - Launch of our Welsh Language Scheme
- 12 Our work in Scotland
  - Academic review 2000-02: key learning points
  - Enhancement-led institutional review
  - Enhancement committees
  - Links between FECs and HEIs
- 15 Degree-awarding powers and university title
- 16 Access to Higher Education
- 16 Development and Enhancement
  - Benchmarking
  - The Code of practice
  - Institutional liaison officers
  - Round table evaluation and future meetings
- 17 International developments
- 18 Results of reader survey
- 19 New complaints and appeals procedures
- 19 Schedule of events
- 20 Recent and forthcoming publications

## Agency offices

### Head office

Southgate House, Southgate Street  
Gloucester GL1 1UB  
Telephone +44 (0) 1452 557000  
Fax +44 (0) 1452 557070  
Email [comms@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:comms@qaa.ac.uk)

### Scottish office

183 St Vincent Street  
Glasgow G2 5QD  
Telephone +44 (0) 141 572 3420  
Fax +44 (0) 141 572 3421

### Officer for Wales

Mike Laugharne  
Telephone +44 (0) 29 2022 8450  
Email [m.laugharne@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:m.laugharne@qaa.ac.uk)

### Agency web site

*higher quality* is published at  
[www.qaa.ac.uk/public/publications.htm](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/public/publications.htm)  
To comment on *higher quality* please email  
[hqfeedback@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:hqfeedback@qaa.ac.uk)

ISSN 1475-3669

## Who is guarding the guards?

In the last year we have successfully completed the first 24 English institutional audits and more than one hundred developmental engagements, on time and to budget, as we promised we would. This is an important milestone in the evolution of external quality assurance in the UK; and it augurs well for the achievement of our mission 'to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of higher education qualifications and to encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of higher education'. The interview with Stephen Jackson, Director of Reviews, on the following pages shows how we, and institutions, are jointly approaching the demands that come with our programmes of reviews.

We are determined that, as our new processes evolve, they should continue to be judged against the twin tests of fitness for purpose and economy of effort (for institutions as well as ourselves). They will need to be evaluated, both internally and externally, to see how far they are meeting those tests. Plans are being put in hand for the independent evaluation of the new English audit method during 2004-05. In Scotland, evaluations have been integrated within the structure of the reviews themselves.

It is important that our work should be independently reviewed. The Agency does not exist for its own benefit. The Department for Education and Skills' new Better Regulation Review Group has been given the role of 'gatekeeper' to check the proportionality and potential burden of all proposed new regulations for higher education in England. This group, largely composed of representatives from the higher education community and its partners and therefore well-informed, will have an important influence on any proposals for change to institutional audit that the evaluation may suggest.

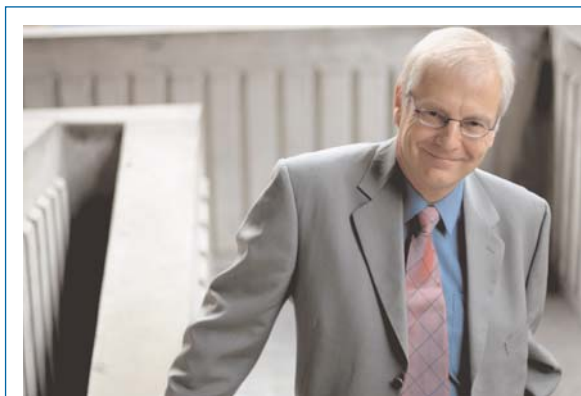
Meanwhile, on the European front, the recent Berlin communiqué, signed by the UK, envisages the creation of a 'register' of European quality assurance agencies. The 'register' would have an associated 'set of standards, procedures and guidelines' to act as criteria for inclusion, and an implicit inspectoral function to monitor compliance. At the same time, the Cabinet Office's Office for Public Service Reform has recently announced that it too intends to exercise a 'gatekeeping' role over all changes proposed by public inspectorates. Given that we are not a public inspectorate, we are surprised to have been included within that group.

Sed quis custodiet ipsos custodes - but who is guarding the guards? Juvenal's question is often asked about quality assurance agencies in higher education. Perhaps the question today should be recast: who is not guarding the guards?



*Peter Willmott*

## The Reviews Group - Interview with Stephen Jackson



Stephen's career started at the City of Liverpool College of Higher Education. The College became part of Liverpool Polytechnic which, in turn, was incorporated into Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU). He became Assistant Provost for Learning at LJMU in 1994, and Director of Partnerships and Widening Participation in 1999.

Between 1993 and 2002 Stephen was an auditor for the Higher Education Quality Council and the Agency, and a review coordinator for academic review in Scotland.

Stephen became Director of Reviews at the Agency in October 2002.

The Group's work covers the development, administration and conduct of all review methods in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, degree-awarding powers and university title and Access to Higher Education. In this interview, Stephen discusses some of this work and its impact on institutions and organisations involved in higher education.

### When you became Director what did you identify as your top priorities?

Internally, restructuring and integration of the old programme review and institutional review directorates into the new Reviews Group. Externally, implementation of the new review methods, especially institutional audit. Things were at a critical stage last year and the method had to fulfil the sector's expectations in terms of lightness of touch. I'd been aware of the Department of Health work before I started, but when I began I realised the scale of the work and the importance of that contract. The other priority was selling the Agency to the sector - networking and the external dimension to the job. There was a lot to learn about the key players and their responsibilities.

### What changes are being made to the Reviews Group?

Two different traditions had grown up around programme review and institutional audit. We need to establish a new Reviews Group that isn't one thing or the other. We're putting people into position and getting the new structure up and running. The real test of whether or not the Group works will be how we conduct our business in the future and whether we can support the review processes even more effectively than we have done in the past.

### What are the distinguishing features of institutional audit?

We need to recognise where institutional audit comes from, following the negotiations in 2001

about approaches to quality in higher education. Part of that deal was a clear understanding that institutions are responsible for managing the standards and quality of their awards.

In the past, particularly with subject review, there was a tendency to look at the Agency as an 'inspecting' organisation. The new method steps back from this. We review the practice of self-management and ensure that institutions are doing what they say they're doing in terms of their own published information. This is a fundamental difference.

The introduction of discipline audit trails (DATs) and the subject focus has added a level of complexity that was not there with continuation audit. Our audit reports include more fine detail. We've got the evidence base at discipline level that teams can draw on to support the conclusions and judgements.

### How have institutions responded to institutional audit?

The feedback has been generally positive and institutions find the process productive. It engages with the right people and the questioning is more about what institutions are doing themselves, about their standards and quality procedures, rather than looking directly at standards and quality issues within institutions.

One of the most positive things is the engagement of students and the emphasis this has placed on their learning experience. Institutions manage their relations with students in different ways. There are many examples of good practice. But some institutions need to offer more support, for example to get more feedback from students or getting students to participate in committees.

We've received compliments about the professionalism of the conduct of audit. This is very heartening. All of the effort we put into the training of the audit teams and the preparation for the new method means that it has operated smoothly.

### What advice would you give to institutions to be audited during 2003-04?

We've always asked for the self-evaluation document (SED) to be a critical review. But many institutions see the SED as a public statement and want to put a positive spin on the information. Audit teams need to get beyond the spin and understand what's actually happening in an institution; how it works and what it does when issues are identified. My advice would be to make the SED as honest, straightforward and evaluative as possible. A practical tip would be for institutions to align what they say in their SEDs to the structure of our reports, in terms of the areas we look at in audit.

### What challenges does teaching quality information (TQI) present?

Most of what's in TQI is uncontroversial, because it's already available. The main issue has been the requirement for institutions to publish summaries of external examiners' reports and the impact this might have on external examining as a practice. The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) has proposals for simplifying the presentation of external examiners' reports, which we hope will address these concerns.

### Have institutions' perceptions of developmental engagements changed?

There was much scepticism at first. We said we would work very closely with institutions, to allow them to demonstrate the soundness of their internal procedures and use developmental engagements as preparation for audit.

The feedback has been positive. We've made it clear that they're not subject reviews. Most institutions like them, especially the chance to be engaged in, and learn from, the process. There is much support for institutional nominees and their role as full team members. It works best when the member of staff is from a different academic discipline. They can provide a different perspective and disseminate the messages that come out of the process to other parts of the institution.

### How effective are institutions' internal review procedures at discipline/programme level?

The procedures are generally very good, especially following 12 years of audit and subject review. There aren't any major systemic concerns. A decade ago, there would have been a difference between ex-polytechnics and the older universities because of the new universities' CNAA background. That difference isn't there anymore. The pre-1992 universities have well-established procedures for internal management of quality.

### How are further education colleges (FECs) responding to academic reviews?

Direct and indirect funding is an issue for many colleges. For some, their directly funded provision is relatively small but they may have a lot of HE activity, franchised from HEIs, which isn't subject to the same level of review.

Our relationship with FECs is a critical issue at the moment, partly due to the debate about our role in relation to Ofsted and the Adult Learning Inspectorate for inspecting FECs and whether we can work more collaboratively with them. FECs are not part of the HE sector, although they provide HE programmes. I believe FECs would like more of an audit approach to their complete HE provision. For some colleges this would reflect the growing maturity of their internal systems.

The conference that we're holding in November (see page 9) is part of the debate and discussion that's been going on. We've also tried to provide opportunities to promote the security of standards and quality in FECs.

### What have been the key findings about higher education in further education (HE in FE)?

FECs are doing a good job. Most programmes are well designed, appropriate and well delivered, and maintaining standards. It's also fair to say that there are more concerns with confidence in standards and quality of learning provision in FE than in HE. Two issues are the management of assessment in some cases and the under-resourcing of FECs in comparison to HEIs.

### What are the findings of the special review of a sample of Foundation degrees?

We've completed 33 reviews and one has been deferred. Most are delivering what they say they'll deliver in a conscientious and comprehensive way. However, there were a small number of 'no confidence' judgements and some general concerns have arisen from the reviews.

In some cases there was limited development of the linkages between HE and FE. The requirement is for foundation degrees to progress onto honours programmes. In those cases the progression routes were underdeveloped or not clearly articulated.

A second concern is the involvement of employers. Foundation degrees should be a partnership between educational providers and employers. In some cases the direct involvement of employers in the design and development of the curriculum and delivering the programmes is quite limited.

Work-based learning was also underdeveloped in some programmes. Foundation degrees should be work-focused awards or have a substantial element of work-based learning. Some included work experience,

but it's not the same as having part of the curriculum delivered and assessed through the workplace.

The more successful degrees have been tailor-made to meet the specific requirements of employers. With foundation degrees for teaching assistants, for example, schools have been actively involved in the development of the curriculum - particularly supporting work-based learning.

#### **How have students contributed to the Agency's review methods?**

This has been a very positive development and students have responded well. We have been clear about the status of student information and how it is seen alongside the SED. Students must have an independent voice and make their own contribution. It's much more important that the submission is done objectively, rather than professionally. Institutions have generally respected the input students have made.

Student input has helped the review process become more student-centred and student-focused. We work with the representative bodies that exist and encourage student unions to represent as wide a range of opinion as possible. The NUS is providing additional support and guidance to students. They are taking their responsibilities very seriously in terms of developing their role in quality assurance procedures in institutions. Students want to get involved in the debates and discussions about institutional policy and strategy.

#### **What impact does the contract for the major review of NHS-funded healthcare programmes have?**

It's a large contract and a substantial part of what we do. It's also a very different approach as the Agency is one partner in a combined review process. Major review involves clinical placements and professional evaluation of student competence. This is a different set of criteria to work with. Professional competencies are a new and interesting area for us.

It's not just subject review for Department of Health-funded programmes. It's a very different approach to quality assurance. Different team composition, skill sets and approaches to the review method are needed to ensure that major review is comprehensive and able to fulfil expectations of all the partners and stakeholders.

#### **How do you see the new methods in Scotland and Wales developing?**

This is one of the big questions for the future for the Agency - the divergence of methods between different parts of the UK. We'll have apparent differences between England, Wales and Scotland. Not in terms of standards of awards, but in approaches to quality assurance - different emphasis, different nuances in the way things are managed. I don't think it's a major problem. There is sufficient commonality between the three processes to provide evidence to support common judgements. All processes look at institutional procedures and evidence about how institutions conduct their business.

The differences are mainly in presentation. The emphasis in Scotland is on enhancement as opposed to assurance, which is the English model. Over time this may lead to differences in how the methods develop. It's also partly to do with how the three methods are managed. There is the opportunity - I won't put it any stronger than that - with the different methods for institutions to develop their procedures along different, although parallel, tracks to meet what they perceive are the expectations of the Agency. I think in Scotland there will be more emphasis on enhancement activity and enhancement strategies within institutions. In England the emphasis will probably remain on demonstrating the effectiveness of quality assurance procedures.

The Welsh sector has had a close involvement with development of review and the method reflects their own particular requirements and expectations.

#### **What activities will the Reviews Group be involved with in the future?**

Once the transitional period (2003-05) audits and reviews are completed and we go onto a six-year cycle of audits, we'll have capacity to do other things. There's more work to be done in overseas audit. We're developing a methodology for collaborative provision and are committed to doing separate collaborative provision audits in the future. We'll also be considering a methodology for reviewing distance and e-learning provision, which doesn't fit in with our existing methods.

## Institutional audit in England

The first 24 institutional audits were successfully completed on time during the spring and early summer. The reports are being published on our web site within 20 weeks of the audit visit. Now we have an opportunity to see the institutional audit process in operation from beginning to end. It has been a considerable relief to find that the process works and is capable of delivering the stated aims and objectives. Informal feedback has been received from institutions and teams. Whilst there are some areas that require further guidance and support, nothing we have seen so far suggests that we need to change the *Handbook for institutional audit* for the rest of the transitional period (2003-05). We have held preliminary visits for autumn 2003 and spring 2004 audits. The lessons learned so far are being passed on to the institutions.

### Evaluation

We are grateful for the informal feedback received to date, but are asking for more formal feedback from everyone involved in audits that have been completed. Questionnaires have been sent to institutions, team members and student groups. These questionnaires will be evaluated. The results will generate further discussions with representatives from teams and institutions so that we can fully understand the information that we have received. We will send invitations to take part in these discussions soon. Some information about the impact of the process will not be available until institutions have had time to consider their response to the findings of their audit. But we will continue to seek contributions to our evaluation process throughout the transitional period.

We are also conducting an evaluation of specific themes emerging from audit reports. By the end of the year a summary of the key features and findings of the first audits will be published.

### Recruitment and training

In the summer we recruited more auditors. We are grateful to institutions that nominated individuals to

join the auditor register. In the autumn and spring terms, training for new auditors and audit secretaries who have been allocated to visits will take place. The lessons learned to date are being reflected in the training. Informal feedback received from institutions indicates that the training has helped teams conduct audits in a professional and competent manner.

### Collaborative audits

From 2004-05 we will be starting a programme of collaborative audits, with the majority conducted after the completion of the first round of institutional audit. The collaborative audit process is being developed and will be based on the model we are using for institutional audit. Further guidance on the process will be available by the end of the year.

### Overseas audits

The reports of the overseas audits in Italy, which we carried out earlier this year, are being finalised. We have now had an opportunity to reflect on all the partnership links that were considered as part of the Italian audit, and the messages they have given us.

The management of collaborative arrangements in UK institutions continues to vary more widely than other aspects of quality assurance in the sector. Where the arrangements are well managed, the partnership benefits everyone involved. There are, however, a small number of institutions where the quality and standards of awards offered in this way do not fully correspond with provision offered more directly. A specific point in relation to the role of students in a partnership was also identified. Where the UK institution has encouraged strong links with the students, the partnership benefits from a greater understanding of the rights and responsibilities of all those involved.

The overseas visit in 2004 will be to Sri Lanka and the institutions that will be taking part in that audit have been contacted.

**Nicola Channon**

## Teaching quality information

Following the publication of *Information on quality and standards in higher education* (HEFCE 02/15), also known as the *Cooke Report*, HEFCE has progressed the implementation of the recommendations. It has commissioned projects on the methods for publishing information, guidance for collecting and using student feedback, and the development of a national survey of student opinion.

The Higher Education Research Opportunities (HERO) team conducted the information project with six higher education institutions. The outcomes have led to a number of amendments to the teaching quality information (TQI) requirements, including proposals for the presentation of information on the HERO web site. Perhaps more important, though, are the changes that are being

made to the contentious proposals that would have required summaries of external examiners' reports to have been published. Under revised arrangements now agreed, these will be reduced to formal confirmation (or not) that three key assessment requirements have been met, and a voluntary opportunity to offer additional comments if the examiner wishes to do so. Institutions will be expected to meet the TQI requirements by December 2004.

The 2003-04 contract between the Agency and HEFCE includes a commitment to keep the implementation of the TQI requirements under review. We have been asked to develop and agree

a method for monitoring and reporting on institutions' adherence to the requirements, and criteria for identifying and responding to any 'causes for concern' resulting from the published TQI. HEFCE, together with HERO and ourselves, are considering the methodological issues associated with this exercise and will be making proposals for managing the process. This activity will focus on the presence and currency of information published by institutions on the HERO web site. In October 2003 HEFCE will be publishing formal guidance on the production of TQI. In due course institutional audit will monitor the accuracy and reliability of TQI material.

**Stephen Jackson**

## Subject-level reviews in HEIs in England

### Developmental engagements

We have just evaluated 113 developmental engagements undertaken in England between January and June 2003. The developmental engagements process, part of the transitional arrangements in English higher education institutions (HEIs) in 2002-05, was outlined in *higher quality 12*. The evaluation drew on questionnaires completed by both institutions and team members. It culminated in an evaluation seminar involving 30 members from developmental engagement teams.

All developmental engagements resulted in judgements of 'confidence' in standards and the quality of learning opportunities.

Response to the engagements has generally been very positive. They are seen as developmental because they are open and transparent; provide good preparation for institutional audit; facilitate dialogue between the institution and the team; encourage identification and sharing of good practice; and permit frank comment on behalf of the institution in its self-evaluation documentation. Innovative features of the process - an institutional nominee as a full team member and the option for subject level students to make a written submission to the team - were all viewed positively.

We are addressing the two most prominent concerns identified through the evaluation: the need to ensure that the institutional nominees feel full and equal members of the team and ensuring consistency in the application of method at different institutions.

These findings have helped to inform revisions to the training programme for those taking part in developmental engagements in 2003-04. Institutions and team members have been briefed about the findings and the minor changes to procedure.

In 2003-04 there will be 60 developmental engagements. These reviews will finish in July 2004 and another evaluation exercise will take place at the end of the academic year.

**Adam Biscoe**

### Academic review in HEIs 2002-03

We completed 20 academic reviews as part of the transitional arrangements. They covered accountancy, computing, electronic engineering, English, environmental sciences, environmental studies, history, law, and social policy and administration and social work. Of these, 13 reviews resulted in judgements of 'confidence' in standards and 'commendable' in each of the three aspects of the quality of learning opportunities. Five reviews resulted in judgements of 'confidence' in standards and 'commendable' in two aspects of the quality of learning opportunities.

The reports of these reviews show that institutions are making explicit use of subject benchmark statements and that generally there is also a clear relationship between programme aims and intended learning outcomes. However, review teams have encouraged institutions to make the language of programme specifications more accessible to students.

Curricula are appropriate and help students achieve the intended learning outcomes. They are also current and responsive to industrial, local and professional needs, as well as to the expectations of external agencies. Research and scholarship actively enhance the curriculum and students' learning experience.

An appropriate range of assessment methods are used, reflecting well-designed assessment strategies. Rigorous assessment practice - including marking, moderation and thorough feedback to students - is

typical. Assessment criteria are generally explicit and made clear to students. Areas for further improvement were identified, including student workload and assessment scheduling, and the match between institutions' learning objectives, assessment instruments and assessment criteria.

Most reviews confirmed appropriate levels of student achievement. A number of reports cited high standards and added value in relation to the particular profile of their student groups. These achievements reflected effective guidance and support. Where it was clear that weaker students were not completing awards, recommendations were made regarding the review of retention and achievement rates.

In 2003-04, 27 reviews will be carried out in 12 HEIs in:

Accountancy  
 Architecture  
 Business and management  
 Computing  
 Dance, drama and performing arts  
 Earth, environmental sciences  
 and environmental studies  
 Engineering  
 English  
 Geography/geology  
 History  
 Law  
 Modern languages  
 Music  
 Social policy and administration and social work.

We still welcome applications for specialist reviewers in these subjects.

**Alexa Christou**

### Learning from subject review

At the end of 2003, we will publish *Learning from subject review: 1993-2001*. This important report will provide a synopsis of the major trends and findings following the completion of the full cycle of teaching quality assessments (TQA) and subject reviews in England and Northern Ireland, and consider the extent to which these processes achieved their aims. The report is aimed at UK higher education quality managers, policy makers, academic practitioners and researchers looking at pedagogical issues. It may also be of interest to overseas policy makers and practitioners.

The TQA/subject review cycle, focusing on the quality of the student experience, was the largest exercise of external review ever undertaken in higher education within the UK. It resulted in the publication of 2,904 subject-level reports for individual institutions and 62 subject overview reports. The report demonstrates that the main aims set by HEFCE were achieved. These were to ensure the accountability of public funds, provide accessible public information, and encourage the sharing and publicising of good practice.

**Adam Biscoe**

## Higher education in English further education colleges

### Academic review of directly-funded FECs

Between February 2002 and June 2003, we conducted 153 academic reviews of programmes directly-funded by HEFCE in FECs. The *Handbook for academic review* sets out the method used. Most reviews were in engineering, computing, and social policy and administration and social work. The majority of programmes reviewed led to HND or HNC awards.

### Judgements for standards and quality

Out of 211 judgements for academic standards, 95 per cent were of 'confidence' in the subject under review. Where there was a joint review, each subject had a separate judgement in standards. For the quality of student learning opportunities there were only two failing judgements; one in student progression and another in learning resources.

Across all subjects the highest percentage of commendable judgements (59 per cent) was awarded to teaching and learning, and student progression. Learning resources received 39 per cent of commendable judgements.

### Feedback from focus groups

We recently conducted a series of focus groups to verify the results of the comments received in our evaluation questionnaires. College representatives, specialist reviewers and coordinators attended these events. The results confirmed that while colleges found the reviews challenging, they also found the exercise useful and appreciated the way they were conducted - in a spirit of dialogue and openness. They also reported that much was learnt from the experience.

### Learning from HE in FE

We are now working on a report that focuses on the good practice in HE in FE identified in the programme of academic reviews conducted to date. This report will be published by the end of the year.

A review of the individual reports has resulted in the following encouraging findings. The programmes are vocational in their content and in the teaching and learning methods adopted, with transferable skills embedded in the curriculum. Providers offer a range of modes of study. This flexibility provides significant opportunities for mature students, who would not normally have entered a university environment. Approximately 30 per cent of students continued their studies to degree level either at the college or another higher education provider. Students value the small class sizes and the contact with their tutor. They appreciate the considerable personal and academic support given to them by dedicated and committed teaching staff, which is often instrumental in their achievement of their award. Students confirmed that they were involved in the monitoring and evaluation of their programmes, largely through module and periodic questionnaires, the results being included in the annual self-assessment report.

The conclusions that can be drawn from the judgements made and the positive comments found in the reports are very reassuring for the college sector. The vast majority of reviews show that they are providing courses that meet the appropriate academic standards and provide students with a positive learning experience.

### New subjects for 2003-04

The next cycle of reviews in FECs, starting in October 2003, are mainly in art and design; dance, drama and performing arts; and communications, media, film and television studies. A complete list of the subjects can be found on page 53 of the *Handbook for academic review*. We are holding more workshops to help subject leaders prepare for academic review and briefing sessions for subject review facilitators. We still welcome applications for specialist reviewers in the subjects being reviewed in this cycle, especially from those who have experience of teaching higher education in FECs and/or experience of BTEC higher national awards.

**Penny McCracken**  
**Gillian Hayes**

### HE in FEC Liaison Group and Forum

In 2002, the Agency established two consultative bodies for further education providers in England and Wales, the HE in FEC Liaison Group and the FEC Forum. The aim of both groups is to provide an opportunity to discuss matters of interest to colleges, related organisations and the Agency.

The Liaison Group includes Agency officers, representatives of FECs offering higher education, plus one representative each of the Association of Colleges (AoC), the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA), and HEIs with FEC interests. The FEC representatives are drawn from across the range of providers of HE in FE.

The Forum is comprised of the Liaison Group and representatives of the Adult Learning Inspectorate, Edexcel, HEFCE, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), Ofsted, and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA).

The Liaison Group and Forum provide opportunities for:

- exchange of information on developments in the sector;
- the Agency to update the sector on work which relates to the FECs;
- FECs, AoC and LSDA to update the Agency on their work;
- collaboration that promotes the enhancement of the student experience and the sharing of good practice;
- the development of methods of review within HE in FECs;
- discussion of the impact at college level of the various review and inspection regimes;
- the identification and discussion of issues of common concern and interest;
- consultation on the development of policy and strategy.

Meetings take place two or three times each year and debate has been lively and constructive. The most pressing themes for delegates have been the regulatory burden placed on FECs and the lack of celebration, by some commentators, of the success of HE in FECs.

**Alan Bradshaw**

### Higher Education Further

On Friday 21 November 2003, we will be holding a national one-day conference, *Higher Education Further*, to discuss the new forms of higher education. The conference brings together further education colleges and higher education institutions. It examines the achievements of higher education delivered by FECs, consortia, specialist colleges, and 'mixed economy' colleges.

The conference will take place from 10:00 to 16:00 at the East Midlands Conference Centre, University Park, Nottingham.

#### Conference programme:

10:00 - 10:30	Coffee and registration Poster session set-up
10:30 - 10:45	Introduction: Peter Williams, Chief Executive, Quality Assurance Agency
<b>Morning theme:</b>	<b>Diversity of Expectation in Higher Education, chaired by Peter Williams</b>
10:45 - 11:00	<b>Outcomes of subject/academic review</b> Gillian Hayes, Quality Assurance Agency
11:00 - 11:30	<b>Keynote speaker: Diverse delivery and good practice</b> Penny Blackie, Higher Education Partnerships Manager, City College Manchester
11:30 - 12:30	<b>Seminar groups</b> integrating representatives of higher education institutions and further education colleges Morning seminar themes are transmitted to the plenary and then to the afternoon parallel sessions
12:30 - 13:30	<b>Lunch with Poster session</b>
13:30 - 14:00	<b>Plenary</b> Morning seminar questions reported and then sent to afternoon parallel sessions
<b>Afternoon theme:</b>	<b>Good Practice, chaired by Valerie Stead, member of the Agency's Board of Directors</b>
14:00 - 14:30	<b>Keynote speech</b>
14:30 - 15:30	<b>Parallel sessions</b> Views from and questions to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Widening participation group • Funding group • Edexcel - Jill Lanning</li> <li>• QAA - Stephen Jackson • Foundation Degree Forward - Derek Longhurst</li> </ul>
15:30 - 16:00	<b>Keynote speaker: <i>Higher Education Further: the Future</i></b> Dr John Brennan, Chief Executive Officer, Association of Colleges
16:00	<b>Opportunity for informal discussions and networking across the sector</b> Light refreshments/Close

The principal speakers include Peter Williams (Chief Executive of the Agency) and Penny Blackie (Higher Education Partnerships Manager, City College Manchester). There will be parallel sessions offering the chance to debate with national agencies, and workshops on themes such as diversity of expectations in higher education and good practice. There will also be an opportunity to report good practice in a poster session. Please email y.jones@qaa.ac.uk for more information.

## Review of Foundation degrees

### England

Between February and June 2003, we conducted 34 reviews of individual foundation degree programmes. The sample of programmes was selected to reflect types of institution, subject, mode of study and location. They were divided equally between the prototypes projects that received HEFCE development funding and other institutions.

The *Handbook for the review of foundation degrees in England 2002-03* set out the method. From 2003-04, the arrangements for foundation degrees will be considered as part of the institutional audit of the higher education institution that awards the

qualification. In addition, we have been asked by HEFCE to include the review of directly-funded foundation degrees in the programme of academic review of higher education in further education colleges. We are discussing the arrangements for this with the colleges concerned.

The judgements that can be made are: 'confidence' or 'no confidence' in the emerging standards and emerging achievements of students ('emerging' because at the time of the reviews few programmes had graduated their first intake); 'confidence' or 'no confidence' in the quality of learning opportunities, together with the

monitoring and enhancement arrangements. Of the judgements received to date, 87 per cent of provision obtained two confidence judgements.

In *higher quality 12*, we stated that the individual reports would remain confidential to the providers, the Agency and the evaluators appointed by HEFCE. In November 2003, however, we will be publishing an overview report. This will draw out the key findings and focus on examples of good practice and innovation. Because of the diversity in subjects, mode of study and size of the consortia within the sample, the findings are based on small numbers of programmes. The report has been written to help the sector in the future development of foundation degree programmes.

### Northern Ireland

Between February and May 2003, there were seven reviews of foundation degrees delivered at colleges in Northern Ireland and validated by the University of Ulster and The Queen's University of Belfast. In all cases the HEI was appropriately monitoring the quality and standards of its awards. The reviews were carried out in collaboration with the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI), which also undertook a survey of the delivery of the programmes in the colleges. The result has been a joint report, which is on the web site of both the Agency ([www.qaa.ac.uk/public/foundation/NI/foundation\\_overviewPartA.htm](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/public/foundation/NI/foundation_overviewPartA.htm)) and the Department for Education in Northern Ireland's ETI section ([www.deni.gov.uk/inspection\\_services/index.htm](http://www.deni.gov.uk/inspection_services/index.htm)).

Penny McCracken

## Major review of NHS-funded health professions programmes

### Introduction

The Department of Health, in partnership with the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC), the Health Professions Council (HPC) and the Workforce Development Confederations (WDCs), has contracted with the Agency to implement and conduct major review of NHS-funded healthcare programmes in England from February 2003 to December 2006. The cycle of major review activity will start in January 2004. The purpose and action of major review, as part of a broader quality assurance framework, is outlined in *Streamlining quality assurance in healthcare education: purpose and action* (Department of Health 2003). We are working with the partners and stakeholders to achieve streamlining and reduce the burden on health schools, departments and clinical placements.

Achievements so far include the NMC agreeing to accept the self-evaluation document produced for major review as the higher education institution's annual report for that academic year. NMC visitors will be reviewers and use the evidence drawn from the major review event to produce the annual monitoring report for specific provision for NMC. This means the higher education institution and NHS Trusts do not have a separate NMC Visitor event in the year of major review. HPC are revising their quality assurance processes through three professional liaison groups working through to the end of 2003. We will coordinate with HPC and the allied health professions through these groups to continue the streamlining and integration. WDCs and the DH are in the process of reviewing the contracts with higher education institutions; an outcome is expected next spring. It is expected that WDCs will use the published report as an equivalent to that of a fundamental review or annual contract review, reducing the necessity for a separate event.

### Provision and reviewers

The subjects/professions that will be reviewed, in the first instance, are occupational therapy, radiography, nursing, midwifery, health visiting, clinical psychology, audiology, speech and language therapy, physiotherapy, orthoptics, prosthetics and orthotics, podiatry (chiroprody) and operation department practitioners. Other professions may well be included during the review cycle.

Nominations for reviewers are proceeding well for many professions, although we lack nominations in audiology, clinical psychology, podiatry, orthoptics and operating department practitioners. Please refer to our web site at [www.qaa.ac.uk/health/health\\_home.htm](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/health/health_home.htm) for information on the criteria and the nominations forms.

### Process

The approach reflects the specific characteristics of healthcare programmes, particularly the complementary and interrelated elements of theory and practice. The *Handbook for major review of healthcare programmes*, published in July 2003, has been developed and refined in consultation with the Department of Health and its partners.

### Major review has some key characteristics

- It is a collaborative initiative to assure the quality of professional healthcare programmes, in terms of standards and the professional requirements of a health service designed around the patient.
- In making judgements it addresses both the theoretical and practice components, however and wherever delivered.
- Reviewers are drawn from practice as well as academic backgrounds.
- All review teams are composed of both academics and practitioners with relevant professional qualifications.

- It uses NHS policies and protocols - for example national service frameworks, workforce development confederation guidelines, and professional and statutory regulatory body requirements - as points of reference.
- It considers the breadth and quality of interprofessional learning.
- Reports document judgements in relation to fitness for purpose, fitness for practice and fitness for award.

### Judgements

The review team expresses 'confidence' or 'no confidence' in:

- academic and practitioner standards (learning outcomes; curriculum design; assessment; student achievement) for each benchmarked area.

The team also awards 'commendable', 'approved' or 'failing' for:

- the quality of learning opportunities in learning and teaching; student progression; and learning resources and their effective utilisation.

### Reports and the Improvement Agenda

As part of the published report of each major review, the providers - higher education institutions and WDCs - prepare an action plan. This plan states how the providers will build on the strengths identified by the review team and address any weaknesses. The action plan provides the focus for on-going quality monitoring and enhancement.

If you have any queries please contact p.lerolland@qaa.ac.uk, telephone 01452 557018 or Elaine Harries Jenkins at e.h.jenkins@qaa.ac.uk, telephone 01452 557120.

**Patricia Le Rolland**

## Our work in Wales

### Institutional review

Following a period of consultation in spring and summer 2003, the *Handbook for institutional review: Wales* will be published in November. Recruitment of reviewers and review secretaries has started. In autumn 2003 there will be briefing events for the sector and the first institutional review will take place in 2004.

Review teams will reach a judgement on the confidence that can reasonably be placed in:

- the soundness of the institution's management of the quality of its programmes and the academic standards of its awards;

and on the reliance that can be reasonably placed on:

- the accuracy, integrity, completeness and frankness of the information that it publishes about its quality and standards.

Thematic trails will be used to test how well institutional procedures work and how effective they are in practice. In undertaking the trails, teams may gather information at the level of individual disciplines, programmes and/or academic departments.

The information base for each review will be a self-evaluation document produced by the institution, and information sets developed by HEFCW's Quality Working Group as part of the wider quality assurance and standards framework for Wales. Students at each institution will also have the opportunity, through their representative body, to make a written submission to the review team.

**Sarah Clark**

### Launch of our Welsh Language Scheme

The Welsh Language Board has approved the Agency's draft Welsh Language Scheme. On 15 July a reception was held at the University of Wales, Bangor to celebrate this important decision. Representatives of higher education institutions in Wales and HEFCW joined other guests and members of the Agency's Board to hear John Walter Jones, Chief Executive of the Welsh Language Board (pictured on the right, with Peter Williams) praise the Scheme for being both comprehensive in its scope and also very practical to implement.



The Language Scheme gives effect to the key principle of the Welsh Language Act (1993) that Welsh and English have equal status under law, and that organisations, such as the Agency, should conduct their business in Wales in a way that enables people to use their preferred choice of

language. In practical terms, the Scheme allows the Agency's core activities to be conducted bilingually. Our core activities for this purpose are institutional review, applications for degree awarding powers and university title and the recognition and review of Authorised Validating Agencies within the Access Recognition Scheme. For these three areas, we will ascertain early in the planning stages the preferred language choices of the higher education institution and persons involved. Then we will plan accordingly, providing bilingual materials and simultaneous translation services. All institutional review reports will be published bilingually.

The Scheme also describes how we will promote a bilingual image in Wales. Our correspondence to higher education institutions in Wales that is Wales

specific, such as circulars and press releases, will be bilingual. All written responses to correspondence emanating in Welsh will be in Welsh. For these purposes, we will have bilingual headed stationery. There are also arrangements for individuals to communicate in Welsh with the Agency by telephone.

The Scheme came into operation formally on 6 October 2003. Bilingual copies of the Scheme have been distributed to higher education institutions and cognate bodies in Wales. Copies are also available on request. For further details please contact [m.laugharne@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:m.laugharne@qaa.ac.uk) or telephone 029 2022 8450.

**Mike Laugharne**

## Our work in Scotland

This section has four parts: the key learning points from academic reviews of subjects; a brief progress report on implementing enhancement-led institutional review (ELIR); the work of the enhancement committees; and a report on collaborative activities being undertaken to support FE/HE links.

### Key learning points from the academic review of subjects in Scotland 2000-02

#### Introduction

Between 2000-02, 73 academic reviews of subjects were completed and reports published (24 in 2000-01; 49 in 2001-02). The programme of review covered 18 Scottish higher education institutions and 21 subject areas. Universal external academic review has ended for most institutions. It continues only for institutions new to the sector that have not had the opportunity to demonstrate the robustness of their internal quality assurance systems.

This commentary is derived from an analysis of all published academic review reports for 2000-02. It highlights the strengths in provision and the main areas for potential enhancement of provision.

#### Summary of judgements

Academic review confirmed the generally high quality of higher education provision in Scotland. In 71 subject reviews (97 per cent), reviewers had confidence in the academic standards of the provision under scrutiny. There were only two reviews where 'no confidence' in academic standards was awarded. In both cases, the institutions have submitted action plans, which address the deficiencies identified, to the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (SHEFC). They are also engaged in follow-up review activity.

In relation to the three aspects of the quality of learning opportunities - teaching and learning, student progression and learning resources - most provision was 'commendable' (86 per cent of all judgements) and a minority 'approved' (14 per cent). No provision was awarded a 'failing' judgement. Over the two-year period, 13 exemplary features were identified across 12 reviews, spanning all three aspects of the quality of learning opportunities.

#### Academic standards

##### Strengths:

- clear and appropriate learning outcomes for the institutional mission and aims, the aims of the programmes and the levels of the awards;
- learning outcomes in line with the expectations of the wider subject communities (subject benchmarks, the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework and, where relevant, the expectations of the professional bodies);
- clearly specified, transparent learning outcomes, which were well-understood by staff and students;
- comprehensive, coherent, progressive and demanding curricula, and a systematic relationship between the curriculum and learning outcomes;
- the relationship between the curriculum and staff research, and other scholarly and professional activity;
- the design of assessment frameworks, which were appropriate and effective in measuring intended learning outcomes and student achievement;
- the development and use of a wide range of assessment instruments (described as 'coherent', 'innovative', 'challenging' and 'excellent');
- in all but one review, student achievement met programme outcomes, the levels of awards and sector expectations. Achievement often extended well beyond these threshold expectations. The

high achievement of students who had benefited from widening access to higher education was also noted.

Potential areas for enhancement activity:

- a range of related issues about the differentiation of programme specifications (explicit articulation of what differentiated programmes, better differentiation between levels in the provision);
- in a few reports, the need to improve articulation arrangements ('bridging' systems or programmes) for students progressing from Scottish Qualifications Authority courses to degree programmes;
- more explicit and comprehensive assessment criteria, and greater clarity and consistency of information on assessment provided to students;
- enhanced quality, comprehensiveness and consistency of feedback to students and wider dissemination of good practice;
- enhancement of assessment protocols and procedures (for example, moderation, involvement of external examiners, security of assessment processes);
- in a few reports, better monitoring and more attention given to student achievement and progression rates, including the need for more systematic analysis of student performance.

### Teaching and learning

Reviewers identified wide-ranging good practice. High-quality teaching was described as imaginative and effective. It also embraced a wide range of delivery methods and provided a stimulating learning experience.

Strengths:

- teaching and learning strategies underpinned by effective teaching and learning committees/groups, and effective induction, training and staff development programmes;
- the commitment, conscientiousness, enthusiasm and dedication of teaching staff;
- teaching and student learning informed by staff research, scholarship and staff participation in national bodies and organisations;
- the commendable variety of teaching and learning opportunities and experiences provided to students;
- high-quality and well-designed supporting materials;
- the use of information and communications technology (ICT) to support learning (for example, in-house tailor-made CD-ROMs, web-based resources, Blackboard and other virtual learning environments).

In four reviews, seven 'exemplary features' were identified in classics and ancient history, engineering, English, philosophy, sociology and anthropology.

These included:

- a holistic and integrated teaching and learning environment;
- the conception, delivery and student learning experience of a particular unit/project;
- the skillful facilitation of an autonomous learning environment for students;
- the involvement of specialized industrial expertise in curriculum delivery;
- an innovative, intensive language learning strategy.

Potential areas for enhancement activity:

- in a few reports, staff needed to engage with developments in teaching and learning practice (including ICT) and identify and disseminate good practice through, for example, peer observation.

### Student progression

Strengths:

- comprehensive, well-communicated and effective admission procedures and induction arrangements;
- high progression and completion rates;
- the ethos generated through supportive learning environments and the approachability and accessibility of staff.

In three reviews, 'exemplary features' were identified in architecture, computing and law. These included:

- an awareness of, and attention to, special needs permeating all aspects of a department's provision;
- very high quality course information provided to students;
- the subject-specific induction facilities available to students.

Potential areas for enhancement:

- while many reviews identified good progression and retention rates, there was a similar number of references to poor retention and progression rates, and the need to monitor and review arrangements to improve on these rates.

### Learning resources

Strengths:

- the high quality and appropriateness of staff resources. (Reviewers identified good staffing levels, with balanced teams of well-qualified academic staff. They had appropriate and well-developed expertise, and their research and practice-based activities informed their teaching);
- learning facilities (institutional and departmental), which were well resourced, effectively managed and included good ICT provision.

In three reviews, 'exemplary features' were identified in computing/engineering, history and law.

These included:

- the excellent use of archival resources;
- the private/public partnership in the provision of subject-specific facilities;
- student assessment materials.

Potential areas for enhancement:

- in a small number of reviews, the need to ensure appropriate staffing levels (academic and support staff) and the need to further enhance staff development;
- the need to enhance library and other learning facilities (specifically ICT facilities) for staff and students was an issue in many review reports.

### Enhancement-led institutional review

Following a productive consultation between the sector, Universities Scotland, SHEFC and the student representative bodies in Scotland, the *Handbook for enhancement-led institutional review: Scotland*, setting out the framework for the new method, was published in April 2003. This was followed by consultation on and publication of the ELIR *Operational Manual*. The *Manual* accompanies the *Handbook* and sets out the operational detail for the review method. The main audience for the *Manual* is ELIR team members, although it may be of interest to colleagues with operational responsibilities within institutions. Copies of both documents are on our web site and have been distributed to our quality assurance contacts within each Scottish institution.

We received a very positive response, from across the UK, to our request for reviewers and review secretaries to undertake ELIR reviews. Recruitment for the first four reviews, scheduled between January and June 2004, has been completed. All reviewers and review secretaries will undertake customised training, with the first two training sessions being held in November 2003. All team members (including student reviewers and review secretaries) will be trained together, with student reviewers attending one additional day's training. Further training sessions have been scheduled for June and November 2004.

The first four institutions to participate in an ELIR review will be the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, Glasgow, the University of Glasgow, Queen Margaret University College, Edinburgh, and Bell College of Higher Education. In August 2003, the first of the annual discussion meetings between these institutions and the Agency's assistant directors was held. One output from this scheduled opportunity for discussion was the production of an institutional profile, which will be shared with the ELIR team that visits the institution. The profile should ensure that the teams understand the context and mission of the institutions they are visiting, and clarify the subject-level review method in place at the institution.

Ailsa Crum

### Enhancement committees

The steering committees for the 2003-04 enhancement topics ('Meeting Student Needs' and 'Assessment') have almost finalised their programmes of activities. On 26 September 2003, a national conference to launch the work was held at the University of Dundee. There were key speakers from Scotland, America and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). The conference provided a valuable opportunity for participants to discuss the enhancement work within a national and international context and to consider the best way for the work to inform and support institutional practice. The web site to support the work of the enhancement themes was also launched at the conference ([www.qaa.ac.uk/scottishenhancement](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/scottishenhancement)).

A conference for students is also being arranged for later this calendar year. It will provide an opportunity for the student community to engage more fully with the work of the enhancement themes.

Discussions with Universities Scotland and the higher education sector have taken place to identify the two themes, chairs and steering committees for enhancement work in 2004-05. Planning for the programme of activities in 2004-05 with the new steering groups will probably start in January 2004.

David Bottomley

### Links between further education colleges and higher education institutions

Following a series of developmental workshops, a draft set of guidelines on good practice in FE/HE credit links has been issued for consultation. The Scottish Advisory Committee on Credit and Access (SACCA) and the Association of Scottish Colleges (ASC) will publish the final guidelines early in 2004.

In March 2003 work started on the mapping, tracking and bridging projects for FE/HE links. The project is managed by Professor Alex MacLennan (Assistant Principal, University of Paisley) and is under the strategic direction of David Bottomley. The team was completed in June with the appointment of Iona Jarvie and Bernie Regan.

Alongside the SACCA-ASC Working Group, the projects will generate a national framework to help further and higher education institutions develop clear information, monitoring and support for students progressing from FECs to HEIs. Working closely with the Regional Access Coordinators, the projects are benefiting from the guidance of a Steering Group representing both sectors.

An audit of all the progression routes from higher national qualifications into degree level study at Scotland's HEIs has taken place and a fully searchable online mapping system has been developed.

The system is currently being tested and reviewed by the sectors to guide future developments.

In June 2003, a forum of practitioners experienced in providing bridging support to students met to identify key characteristics of effective support for students making the transition from an FEC to an HEI. This event launched a comprehensive consultation with all key stakeholders that will continue until the end of 2003.

In relation to tracking, the project team is reviewing existing data and information sources and exploring the potential for a 'unique learner identifier'. This review will inform the next stages of the project work, which will aim to agree a common set of data fields to enable the successful tracking of learners in terms of their entrance, credit transfer, progression and achievement.

**Iona Jarvie**  
**Bernie Regan**

## Degree-awarding powers and university title

### Our responsibilities

Since 1999, we have been responsible for offering confidential guidance to the Privy Council on applications from organisations seeking degree-awarding powers and/or university title.

### Government criteria

In offering our advice to the Privy Council, we have regard to criteria set by Government. The most recent set of criteria published in 1999, which are accessible via our web site, are clustered around a series of themes. These include organisational governance and management, quality assurance and academic standards, the arrangements for supporting student learning, staffing and the organisation's administrative infrastructure.

### Consistent, evidence-based recommendations

We believe that our recommendations should be the result of close and careful consideration of each application. In particular, we are conscious that our scrutiny procedures and recommendations must be fully secure, evidence-based and consistently applied.

### The application process

Applications are initially considered by a sub-committee of the Agency's Board (the Advisory Committee on Degree-Awarding Powers). The Chairman of the Agency's Board chairs this Committee. Its members include heads of UK universities, the head of a Standing Conference of Principles (SCOP) sector college with its own degree-awarding powers, senior level representatives from business and commerce, and observers from the Department of Education and Skills (DfES), the Scottish Executive Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Department, the National Assembly for Wales, and the Department of Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland.

If an application merits further examination, experienced and senior academic peers are engaged to scrutinise the organisation. The advice offered by these assessors is based around the reading of documentation; meetings with staff,

students and external stakeholders; and the observation of organisational events such as committee meetings, programme approval and review events and examination boards. While every effort is made to ensure that a scrutiny takes no longer than is absolutely necessary, the gathering of evidence may take some time to complete. The evidence is collated in a detailed assessor report that analyses the performance of the applicant organisation in respect of the Government's criteria. The Advisory Committee on Degree-Awarding Powers and the Board then consider the advice of the assessors before a recommendation is made to the Privy Council.

### Consultation on revised criteria

In the light of the policy proposals contained in the Government's, *The future of higher education* (January 2003), earlier this year the DfES asked the Agency to review the appropriateness of the 1999 degree-awarding powers and university title scrutiny criteria. We offered our advice and the DfES is undertaking a sector-wide consultation exercise on possible changes to the criteria. Revised criteria will be published early in 2004. In the interim, the DfES has decided that it would not be appropriate to consider any further new applications from organisations in England and Northern Ireland. Scotland and Wales are deciding whether to ask us to suspend consideration of new applications from organisations in their countries. The DfES consultation paper is available through the Department's web site at [www.dfes.gov.uk](http://www.dfes.gov.uk)

### New responsibilities

After six years I am handing over my responsibilities for degree-awarding powers and university title to Sarah Clark. My new role is Deputy Director within the Reviews Group. If you have any queries regarding degree-awarding powers and university title please contact [s.clark@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:s.clark@qaa.ac.uk) or telephone 01452 557107.

**Chris Haslam**

## Access to Higher Education

### Statistics

This year's *Key Statistics* on QAA-recognised Access provision showed increases on last year in many areas. These include the number of Access programmes available, students on Access programmes, students awarded Access certificates, Access students applying to and being accepted on higher education programmes, and former Access students registering on higher education courses. Increases followed the pattern of recent years. There was continued growth, in particular, in the numbers studying subjects allied to medicine and biological sciences. This was also the case for social studies and courses in education. The *Key Statistics* leaflet and the more detailed *Joint Agency Report (Access to HE) 2003* are available on our web site.

### Development

In the *Future of Higher Education*, the Agency was asked to develop proposals 'to modernise the criteria for Access Courses so that they are sufficiently flexible and attractive to meet the needs of today's adult learners'. We are looking at the organisation and delivery of Access programmes, the preparation for higher education they provide and the nature of the qualification to which they lead. Specific areas of research include:

- common patterns in the structure, type and mode of delivery of Access programmes;

- examples of innovation, and the potential for their extension and development;
- responses to changes in higher education and opportunities for new areas for development;
- the appropriateness of the content and style of Access programmes as a preparation for the higher education experience;
- the balance between responsiveness and diversity of provision and the demonstration of consistency of quality and standards;
- the description of achievement for the award of the Access to Higher Education certificate;
- opportunities and barriers to Access students' progression.

We are seeking views of a wide range of those involved with Access to Higher Education. At the end of October, we will be holding round table discussion meetings with those involved in the higher education admissions process. These will take place on Tuesday 21 October at SCOP, Woburn House, London and on Monday 27 October at Aston Business School, Birmingham. If you are interested in participating in these discussions, or would like to make any other contribution to this project, please contact [a.karadia@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:a.karadia@qaa.ac.uk) for further details.

**Kath Dentith**

## Development and Enhancement

This update covers the maintenance of the academic infrastructure that underpins the articulation of standards (through use of the reference points provided by the frameworks for higher education qualifications, benchmark statements and programme specifications) and the management of quality assurance procedures within institutions (through engagement with the relevant sections of the *Code of practice*).

### Benchmarking

A Steering Group for benchmarking met for the first time in June 2003. It has been set up to advise the Agency on procedure and process for the recognition of further subject benchmark statements at honours level. This has become necessary because we have received many requests from various academic subject communities for additional benchmarks - an unexpected indicator of the success of the scheme. A draft set of proposals will be circulated for consultation later in the year. The Steering Group will also consider how the Agency should review and

revise existing statements, and oversee an evaluation of their use and value.

### The Code of practice

We have started to revise the section of the *Code of practice* on external examining, in the light of recommendations in the report earlier this year of the Teaching Quality Enhancement Committee. The section on collaborative provision and the guidelines on distance learning are also being reviewed. In a further development of our suite of quality assurance guidance documents we are being advised, by another panel drawn from the sector, on the drafting of guidelines on accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL). In each case, discussion meetings that were jointly sponsored with Universities UK and SCOP have informed the work. All three areas will probably lead to consultations during autumn 2003. It is also likely that we will (in the light of the outcomes of the HEFCE consultation on a framework of standards for the supervision and training of postgraduate students) review the section on postgraduate research programmes this academic year.

Following discussions in the Better Regulation Review Group, set up by the DfES, about the structure, function and use of the *Code of practice*, the revised sections will no longer provide illustrative guidance on possible ways to implement the precepts, but instead will carry explanations of the reasons for the inclusion of individual precepts.

### Institutional liaison officers

We have had a very positive response to the introduction of our institutional liaison scheme. Many Agency officers have held introductory meetings with some or all of their higher education institutions and have already set the date for follow-up meetings; other introductory meetings will take place in the autumn. Whilst we recognise that it may be a little early to be carrying out such an activity, we are conducting an interim evaluation of the liaison scheme and plan a full evaluation and report before the end of the academic year. These will be designed to assess the usefulness of the scheme in improving the two-way flow of information between institutions and the Agency on quality assurance issues.

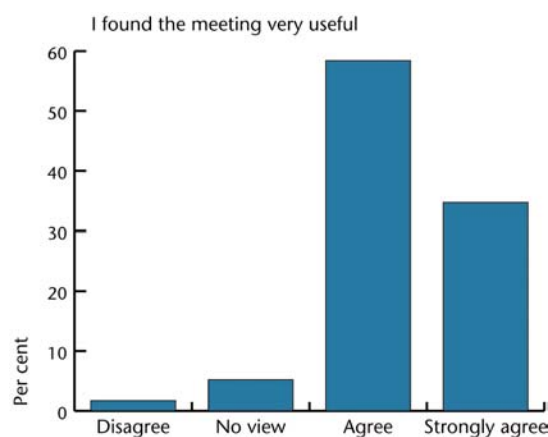
### Round table evaluation

Between February and April 2003 eight round table discussion meetings were held in collaboration with Universities UK and SCOP. These meetings considered the sections of the *Code of practice* on collaborative provision, external examining and general aspects concerned with programme specifications and the framework for higher education qualifications.

Questionnaires were completed by 173 attendees following each meeting and they were asked to indicate their relative satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

We have evaluated their responses and provided a summary:

On the whole, the majority (93.1 per cent) of respondents found the meeting very useful. However, 1.7 per cent (3 people) disagreed.



### Future meetings

More discussion meetings have been scheduled to support the consultations on draft revisions to sections of the *Code of practice* and other quality assurance issues. Full details are available at [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk) and from [s.melvin@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:s.melvin@qaa.ac.uk)

Monday 3 November	External examining	London
Tuesday 18 November	APEL	Sheffield
Wednesday 19 November	External examining	Sheffield
Tuesday 25 November	Progress files	London

The work of the Development and Enhancement Group will be reported in greater detail in the next edition of *higher quality*.

**Nick Harris**

## International developments

September 2003 was a busy month for participants in the burgeoning international discussions on quality assurance in higher education. From Cancun to Berlin and Paris to Brussels, members of inter-governmental organisations (the World Trade Organisation [WTO], the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD] and UNESCO); the signatories of the inter-governmental Bologna Process; and participants in the European Commission's 'Tuning' projects, have all held meetings. They discussed trade in education services, progress in the development of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), and taking forward the definition of subject specific competences. A common thread in the debates was quality assurance and an emerging theme is the need for international cooperation in the quality assurance of higher education. The field is becoming

crowded with many players jostling in an attempt to seize the agenda and regulate international higher education.

### From Bologna to Prague to Berlin: en route to the EHEA

On 18-19 September, the third meeting of the ministers responsible for higher education in the 34 signatory countries to the Bologna Declaration was held in Berlin. The UK is one of the original signatories to the Declaration and is represented by the DfES in the follow-up process. Given the wide-ranging aims of the Bologna process (which touch the activities of many stakeholders in the UK higher education system) a common UK negotiating position on the process was agreed, prior to the Berlin meeting, by the newly established UK High

Level Policy Forum. The Forum includes representation from Universities UK, SCOP, Universities Scotland, the funding councils, the DfES, the Scottish Executive and the Agency. The preparatory papers for the Berlin meeting and the formal Communiqué following the meeting are available at [www.bologna-berlin2003.de](http://www.bologna-berlin2003.de). Significant outcomes from the Berlin meeting include: agreement on the development of an overarching framework of qualifications in the EHEA, within which individual signatory countries' national frameworks can be located; further cooperation in quality assurance; and the continued promotion of the European Credit and Transfer System.

#### Trade in Education Services: a case for quality assurance?

Since 1995, education services have been included in the WTO's General Agreement on Trade in Education Services (GATS). Five categories of education are broadly defined in the GATS; primary, secondary, higher education, adult education and training, and other education services. There is, however, a lack of clarity about the exact nature of the three latter categories. Education Services is one of the least committed areas of GATS.

Communications from four countries - Australia, Japan, New Zealand, USA - in the current Doha round of negotiations on GATS proposed the further liberalisation of trade, especially in relation to private education in the last three categories.

The debates around trade in education services are very polarised and often ill informed. But both supporters and opponents of trade liberalisation see quality assurance or the lack of international regulation of higher education as key issues. Useful information on the debate is available from the

Observatory on Borderless Higher Education through articles written by Jane Knight. These are available at [www.obhe.ac.uk](http://www.obhe.ac.uk)

The OECD has also stepped in. It has established a team of 'experts' to prepare for a meeting - in Trondheim in November 2003 - between trade and education sectors. Along with UNESCO, OECD is proposing a Code of Practice in International Quality Assurance.

#### Tuning: new task forces assemble

The Tuning Project ([www.relint.deusto.es](http://www.relint.deusto.es)), funded by the European Commission and managed by the Universities of Deusto and Groningen, is now in its second phase. As well as looking at the definition of subject competences in nursing and European studies, it is assembling two task force teams to consider teaching, learning and assessment, and quality assurance. Further information on the former is available from Nick Harris and from myself on the latter. Please email [n.harris@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:n.harris@qaa.ac.uk) or [c.campbell@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:c.campbell@qaa.ac.uk)

#### Recent developments in quality assurance and accreditation in the United Arab Emirates (UAE)

The Commission for Academic Accreditation in the UAE ([www.caa.ae](http://www.caa.ae)) has advised us that, with effect from September 2003, it has introduced new accreditation and licensure provisions. These will affect all institutions operating in the UAE. The Commission is happy to discuss the requirements in detail with representatives of any institution seeking to establish a presence in the UAE. We have raised several points for clarification in relation to foreign providers.

**Carolyn Campbell**

## Results of reader survey

To ensure *higher quality* is meeting readers' needs we carried out a readership survey, announced in *higher quality* 12. Here we report on the feedback and what we plan to do in response.

The vast majority of respondents (over 90 per cent) found *higher quality* useful and informative. Around 80 per cent of respondents said the structure, text and layout were easy to use and clear. Very few felt that coverage of topics was too detailed and half said that they would like some subjects to be covered in greater depth.

The topic identified as most useful was review and audit processes. It was also the topic most frequently suggested for coverage in future issues including the processes, feedback on outcomes, evaluation of and developments to them.

In some areas respondents had mixed views about what was not useful. While one-third said that coverage of international matters was not useful to them, it was also one of the topics most frequently suggested for future coverage. So while this area is not of interest to all, it is important to others. Readers requested more information on how the Agency's work relates to government and government agencies, and guidance on good practice in relation to quality assurance and reviews. We will continue and expand coverage of these areas. There was also particular interest in teaching quality information, which we cover in this issue.

Respondents said that information on Agency developments was useful. In response, this issue focuses on the Reviews Group including an interview with the Group's Director, Stephen

Jackson. In the next issue we will focus on the work of the Development and Enhancement Group, whose work covers the academic infrastructure. Respondents identified this as an area of particular interest. We will also introduce more news about Agency developments, events and recent and future publications.

Thirty per cent of readers said they would be interested in receiving *higher quality* by email, although most of these would still want to receive a paper copy. We will be looking into ways of

delivering this and would remind readers that *higher quality* is published on our web site.

Finally, as a result of the feedback, we intend to publish three issues of *higher quality* each academic year. This year the other issues will be published in February and June 2004.

Thank you to those readers who completed our reader survey. We welcome feedback and comment at any time and you can email [hqfeedback@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:hqfeedback@qaa.ac.uk).

Jean Lawton

## New complaints and appeals procedures

In July, new and revised complaints and representation procedures were published on our website. We regard a complaint as an expression of dissatisfaction with services we provide or actions we have taken. Complaints are handled through *Complaints from institutions: procedures*. Appeals are challenges to specific decisions, in specific circumstances, and are handled through *Procedures on representations*.

- Revised - *Complaints from institutions: procedures*  
[www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutqaa/procedures/complaints.htm](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutqaa/procedures/complaints.htm)
- New - *Institutional audit and review: procedure on representations*  
[www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutqaa/procedures/representations\\_inst.htm](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutqaa/procedures/representations_inst.htm)
- Revised - *Academic review of subjects: procedure on representations*  
[www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutqaa/procedures/representations.htm](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutqaa/procedures/representations.htm)

## Schedule of events

Date	Subject	Location	Time	Contact
Tuesday 21 October	Access to HE	SCOP, Woburn House, London	afternoon	<a href="mailto:a.karadia@qaa.ac.uk">a.karadia@qaa.ac.uk</a>
Monday 27 October	Access to HE	Aston Business School, Birmingham	morning	<a href="mailto:a.karadia@qaa.ac.uk">a.karadia@qaa.ac.uk</a>
Monday 3 November	External examining	London	10:30-15:30	<a href="mailto:s.melvin@qaa.ac.uk">s.melvin@qaa.ac.uk</a>
Tuesday 18 November	APEL	Sheffield	10:30-15:30	<a href="mailto:s.melvin@qaa.ac.uk">s.melvin@qaa.ac.uk</a>
Wednesday 19 November	External examining	London	10:30-15:30	<a href="mailto:s.melvin@qaa.ac.uk">s.melvin@qaa.ac.uk</a>
Friday 21 November	Higher Education Further conference	East Midlands Conference Centre, University Park Nottingham	10:00-16:00	<a href="mailto:y.jones@qaa.ac.uk">y.jones@qaa.ac.uk</a>
Tuesday 25 November	Progress files	London	10:30-15:30	<a href="mailto:s.melvin@qaa.ac.uk">s.melvin@qaa.ac.uk</a>

## Recent and forthcoming publications

Date	Publications
April 2003	<i>Handbook for enhancement-led institutional review: Scotland</i>
May 2003	<i>Key statistics 2003 (Access)</i>
June 2003	Evaluation of academic review in Wales 2002
July 2003	<i>A brief guide to quality assurance in UK higher education</i>
July 2003	Handbook for institutional review: Wales: draft for consultation (web only)
July 2003	<i>Handbook for major review of healthcare programmes</i>
July 2003	<i>Institutional audit: a guide for student representatives</i>
July 2003	Institutional liaison officer briefing paper (web only)
July 2003	<i>The QAA: An Introduction</i>
September 2003	Enhancement-led institutional review leaflets (for academic staff and student officers)
September 2003	Pilot programme of foundation degrees overview report: Northern Ireland
October 2003	Guidance for HEIs in Wales for assessing in a language other than the language of tuition
October 2003	<i>Welsh Language Scheme</i>
November 2003	Foundation degree overview report: England
November 2003	Handbook for institutional review: Wales (in Welsh and English)
December 2003	Learning from HE in FE
December 2003	Learning from subject review

All of these documents are, or will be, available on our web site at [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk) and in hard copy from our distributors Linney Direct. New reports for institutional audits in England, academic reviews of subjects in England and Scotland, Access and overseas audit have also been published.

### Additional copies

Printed copies of *higher quality* are available free of charge.

### Our publications are available from:

Linney Direct, Adamsway, Mansfield, Nottinghamshire NG18 4FN.

Telephone 01623 450788, Fax 01623 450629, Email [qaa@linneydirect.com](mailto:qaa@linneydirect.com)