

## Informing the public



Last month QAA published, jointly with UCAS, a guide about academic standards and quality for applicants to higher education. This represents an important development for us, and for our role as a source of authoritative information for the public.

Since 2001, when our mainstream subject review programme was completed in England, we have produced very few new reports on the quality and standards of individual subjects in individual higher education institutions (though we continue to undertake subject reviews in English further education colleges). This was, of course, part of the 2001 agreement known as the Quality Assurance Framework in England. The Framework included recognition that occasional external scrutiny could never provide the sort of up-to-date and comprehensive information about quality and standards that applicants and employers were asking for.

Instead, three new sources of publicly available information were envisaged. These would help each student make decisions about the most suitable course for them. As a result, QAA's audit reports, Teaching Quality Information (TQI) provided by universities and colleges, and the outcomes of the National Student Survey of students' satisfaction with their courses, are now all (or will soon be) available to any interested reader.

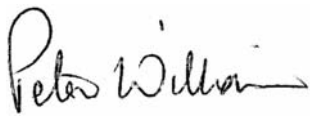
Cont...

### Inside

|    |  |    |   |
|----|--|----|---|
| 2  | International developments                           | 11 | Programme specifications  |
| 4  | Memorandum of Understanding with South Africa's HEQC | 12 | Credit arrangements for England   |
| 4  | Institutional audit and collaborative provision      | 12 | Quality Strategy Network conference                                       |
| 5  | Outcomes from institutional audit                    | 13 | QAA in Wales  |
| 6  | The Quality Assurance Framework Review               | 13 | Evaluating the Quality Enhancement Framework in Scottish higher education |
| 6  | Audit in the People's Republic of China              | 16 | Taking the Scottish QEF to Japan  |
| 6  | Higher education in further education colleges       | 16 | Access to Higher Education  |
| 8  | Foundation Degree reviews                            | 17 | Annual reception 2005   |
| 8  | Major review   | 18 | Strategic plan 2006-11  |
| 9  | General Osteopathic Council reviews                  | 18 | Changes to QAA's Board of Directors                                       |
| 10 | Special review of research degree programmes         | 19 | Conferences and events  |
| 10 | Revisions to the <i>Code of practice</i>             | 20 | QAA publications  |

QAA's audit reports have to meet the needs of several different audiences. Some of the information contained in them is rather technical for the average applicant to higher education. So we've spent a lot of time considering how we can enhance our role as an information provider and have decided that we can most usefully act as a guide to the different sources of data about standards and quality that are available. We provide direct information, through our audit and other review reports, about how well institutions manage their academic standards and quality, and how reliable their own published information is. And through publications such as our joint UCAS guide, we will offer advice about how to interpret and use that published information. We will not be compiling league tables, since these mislead more often than inform, but we will be stressing the need for applicants and employers to use the available information to match their own requirements with what's on offer.

Increasingly, and not only in the UK, good information is being recognised as the key to sound decision making across higher education. We shall do our best to make sure that the standards and quality of the information available to students and employers is of the highest.



**Peter Williams**  
Chief Executive

## International developments

---

### Continuing our work with ENQA

Professor Christian Thune, President of ENQA - the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education - gave a thoughtful and well-received presentation to QAA's Board members at their meeting in March. As well as a general overview of European developments, he covered a number of specific areas, including the Bologna Process, the work of ENQA, the forthcoming Bergen Ministers' meeting, and the ENQA standards and guidelines. The Board was particularly interested in the proposal for a European register of quality assurance agencies: Peter Williams discussed this in the last edition of *higher quality*.

### Increasing regulation of cross-border higher education

After consultation, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) have published their draft guidelines for quality provision in cross-border education. These have been developed with the aim of protecting

students and other stakeholders in higher education from low-quality provision and disreputable stakeholders - a reference to the proliferation of degree and diploma mills operating mainly, but not exclusively, on the internet. The guidelines address six groups of stakeholders in higher education, including student bodies, HEIs and their staff, and quality assurance agencies. They describe the roles and responsibilities of stakeholder groups in cross-border education in activities such as the provision of information, the exchange of good practice and networking, and the regulation of cross-border providers. The draft guidelines are now being considered in the formal approval procedures at both OECD and UNESCO. They can be found at [www.oecd.org/dataoecd/34/42/34732302.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/34/42/34732302.pdf)

In a separate but related exercise, UNESCO-CEPES (the UNESCO European Centre for Higher Education) is proposing some revision to the joint UNESCO-CEPES/Council of Europe *Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education*. This will be considered in June in Dublin at the annual meeting of the recognition networks - the European Network of Information Centres and the National Academic Recognition Information Centres.

## Cross-border education - national developments

The Department of Education, Science and Training in Australia has released a discussion and consultation paper, *A National Quality Strategy for Australian Transnational Education and Training*, as part of the national activities to enhance their 'offshore' education and training. The paper proposes the development of this strategy, and describes four principles to be fulfilled by the strategy and activities in two key areas: improving communication and promotion of Australia's quality framework to all stakeholders, within Australia and internationally; and strengthening the national quality framework. Three potential models for this framework for transnational education are outlined. The consultation period on the paper ended on 20 May.

In April 2005, QAA staff visited the Australian Universities Quality Agency and the Advisory Board for the Australian Qualifications Framework. Discussions about transnational quality assurance activities were part of the agenda.

## The European Commission and quality assurance

Last year, the Commission published a draft *Recommendation on Quality Assurance*. Several of their proposals overlapped with matters already being covered in the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance, which were considered by the Ministers of Education in the European Higher Education Area at their latest biennial meeting. The biennial ministerial conference of the Bologna Process was held in Bergen, Norway, on 19-20 May. The conference approved the 'Bergen Communiqué'. This can be read at [www.bologna-bergen2005.no](http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no)

The conference adopted the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance, which had been developed by ENQA in cooperation with the European Universities Association, the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE) and the National Union of Students in Europe (ESIB). The Communiqué also reported the guidelines to develop further the practicalities of a proposed European Register of quality assurance agencies and report back.

No new action lines have been proposed: 2005-07 is seen as a period of consolidation for Bologna. The next ministerial conference will be in London in May 2007.

The ministerial Bergen Communiqué makes reference to an overarching European Framework for Higher Education Qualifications. Based on the three Bologna cycles (bachelor's, master's and doctoral), it also contains a sub-level within the first cycle that should accommodate qualifications such as the Foundation Degree. This European framework has associated qualification descriptors (the Dublin descriptors), which are compatible with the descriptors of the UK's frameworks for higher education qualifications. The European framework proposals also make reference to the European Credit Transfer System.

The Commission is developing proposals for a qualifications framework for vocational education and training (VET) and has recently established a working group to advise on how a single 'overarching' framework, which encompasses both the Bologna process and VET, might be developed.

## European Union UK Presidency events

From 1 July, the UK assumes the Presidency of the European Union (EU) for six months. During this term there will be a major higher education event, from 10-12 October in Manchester, coordinated by the Department for Education and Skills. The event comprises a series of three meetings: a high-level conference on higher education, a meeting of the EU Directors General for Higher Education, and a meeting of the Bologna Follow-up Group. One of the strands of the conference is 'Quality assurance and QAA'. We will play an active role in the event through participation of our Board of Directors, Peter Williams and me.

For information about the European Framework for Higher Education Qualifications, please contact [n.harris@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:n.harris@qaa.ac.uk), telephone 01452 557136.

For other information about international developments, please contact [c.campbell@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:c.campbell@qaa.ac.uk), telephone 01452 557004.

**Carolyn Campbell**

## Memorandum of Understanding with South Africa's Higher Education Quality Committee



Peter Williams with Dr Mala Singh  
(Executive Director of HEQC)

On 9 February in Pretoria, QAA and its South African equivalent, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) of the Council for Higher Education, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). This MoU consolidates and formalises the close working relationship that has existed for some time between the two organisations, which have much in common and plenty to share.

A programme of joint projects is envisaged, covering technical aspects of audits - including the involvement of students in quality assurance - and the exchange of information and expertise.

This is the third MoU that QAA has signed, the others being with LAN in Malaysia and the Hussein Fund for Excellence, which oversees external quality assurance in Jordan. Others are in the course of being developed with agencies in countries where there is a strong UK higher education interest.

Quality assurance in higher education is fast becoming a global activity, with a far greater level of cooperation and exchange of information between agencies than before. QAA intends to be a leading player in this developing international scene. This will help the UK to consolidate its position as a major exporter of higher education, and support institutions in their efforts to provide high-quality programmes across national borders.

**Peter Williams**

## Institutional audit and collaborative provision

### Institutional audit

We are in the final two terms of the transitional period in England and teams have been allocated to all the institutional audits scheduled for the autumn term. We are beginning to reflect on the process that has been applied to institutional audit, so that we can learn from what has worked, as well as aspects that have been less effective. We can also use this information to propose some revisions for the next cycle. In addition to the work of the Quality Assurance Framework Review Group (see page 6), we have been seeking feedback from individuals and institutions that have experience of audit; this will also inform future developments.

The schedule for the next cycle of institutional audit will not be agreed until the revised method has been finalised.

However, no 'new' audits will take place until late 2006 at the earliest.

### Collaborative provision

The schedule for collaborative provision audit has been agreed and the first two have been completed. We will use our experience of the first two audits to inform a future *higher quality* article about the process. We hope this will help other institutions to prepare for their own collaborative provision audit.

A circular letter has been sent to heads of institutions, asking for nominations of suitable auditors and audit secretaries to take part in these audits. While we do not need many new institutional auditors at this stage, we would like to add a small number of auditors and audit secretaries to our existing registers, as we are keen to ensure that we have individuals

with experience of managing collaborative provision as part of every team. Training will be provided for all successful applicants taking part in collaborative provision audits.

The nomination forms can be found at [www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/appointments](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/appointments)

Nicola Channon

## Outcomes from institutional audit

The first three papers in the *Outcomes from institutional audit* series have been published on our website: an *Initial overview* of the 70 institutional audit reports published by December 2004; the introduction and use of *Programme specifications*; and a paper on *External examiners and their reports*.

### Initial overview

Overwhelmingly, the 70 published audit reports have expressed 'broad confidence' in the soundness of institutions' current and likely future management of the quality of their programmes and the academic standards of their awards. The *Initial overview* also discusses the character of the 70 institutions audited in 2002-03, noting that, from their missions, 15 of the 70 could be considered 'specialist' institutions.

Features of good practice in audit reports include academic guidance and support, and supervision arrangements (personal support and guidance, and staff development). The *Initial overview* also identifies clusters of recommendations in assessment arrangements, the approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes, the use of external reference points and the ways in which institutions work with their external examiners. These recommendations should be seen in the context that most of the institutions demonstrate strengths in the way they have designed their frameworks for managing academic standards and quality. The clusters of good practice and recommendations will be the subject of further papers in the *Outcomes... series*.

### External examiners and their reports

Overall, institutions' external examining arrangements are consistent with the advice of QAA's *Code of practice* (section 4) and are working well. Features of good practice include the nomination, appointment and induction of

external examiners. With few exceptions, external examiners report conscientiously on the programmes and awards with which they are associated. External examiners' reports are generally read carefully. These reports are used to inform the management of academic standards and quality, often through institutional overviews; some overviews identify patterns and trends in these reports. *External examiners and their reports* notes that when responsibility for the briefing and induction of external examiners, or for checking that action is taken to respond to their reports, has been shared between the centre of the institution and faculty or school-level units, care may be needed to ensure that such responsibilities are properly fulfilled. In some cases, institution-wide measures to record and track exchanges with external examiners are recommended.

### Programme specifications

This paper focuses on the developmental aspects of the introduction and adoption of programme specifications. It notes the variety of views among institutions about the purposes of programme specifications. Some institutions view them as technical documents, chiefly for internal quality management purposes; some see them as primarily for students; others are developing programme specifications that can meet both needs. Where institutions are taking this last approach, essentially developing versions of the same document to serve different audiences, the need for effective version control of the contents is suggested. A theme running throughout is the need for information provided to staff and students, through programme specifications, to be unequivocally current and authoritative.

## Future papers

The next paper in the *Outcomes ...* series will discuss how institutions have worked with *The framework for higher education qualifications*. This will be published in June and followed by papers on *Academic guidance, support and*

*supervision and Student representation and feedback arrangements.*

All the papers are published on our website only at [www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/institutionalaudit/outcomes](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/institutionalaudit/outcomes)

**David Cairns**

## The Quality Assurance Framework Review

The Quality Assurance Framework Review Group, chaired by Dame Sandra Burslem, has completed its evaluation of the costs and effectiveness of the programme of institutional audits and transitional arrangements conducted between 2002 and 2005. The Group's report will be considered by the HEFCE Board in June 2005. Once it has been approved by the sponsoring bodies - HEFCE, Universities UK,

the Standing Conference of Principals and QAA's Board - QAA will progress the recommendations and consider any necessary amendments to the institutional audit process. The revised method is due to be implemented in 2006-07.

We will provide an update on this work in the next edition of *higher quality*.

**Stephen Jackson**

## Audit in the People's Republic of China

During the week beginning 25 April 2005, senior QAA staff visited Beijing and Shanghai in preparation for the proposed audit of UK higher education programmes provided in China.

The purpose of the visit was to meet with representatives from the Ministry of Education, to explain the purpose of the audit and to discuss the work of QAA. The discussions also covered a variety of other matters relating to the experience of Chinese students studying on UK higher education programmes. In addition, the visit provided an opportunity to meet other government agencies responsible for standards in higher education, organisations involved in promoting cooperation between the UK and

the People's Republic of China, and staff working in institutions and organisations that have established links with UK partners.

QAA staff explored the logistical arrangements for the audit visit planned for spring 2006. The audit is likely to be conducted by three teams working from different locations within China. It will include a range of different types of partnership arrangement, including joint programmes, validated provision, franchised programmes and articulation arrangements.

The briefing visit was organised with the assistance and support of the British Council.

**Stephen Jackson**

## Higher education in further education colleges

### Academic review of subjects

By the end of April, 17 of the 37 reviews scheduled for 2004-05 had been completed. Reviewers reported judgements of 'confidence' in standards and at least 'approved' in the quality of learning opportunities for 16 of these reviews. One review has resulted in 'no

confidence' in standards and 'failing' in one of the aspects of the quality of learning opportunities. The remaining reviews are in progress. All reviews will be completed by the end of June 2005.

Four re-reviews, scheduled for this year, have been cancelled because of a change in funding

from direct to indirect arrangements with partner HEIs or consortia. In these cases, the HEI takes responsibility for the academic standards and quality of the provision.

There have also been two instances this year where QAA has conducted a rapid follow-up visit after a 'no confidence' or 'failing' judgement. In both cases, the institution decided not to offer the provision in the subsequent year and would therefore be unavailable for re-review within 12 months. The follow-up visits, carried out by a subset of the original review team, aim to secure academic standards and quality for those students completing the course.

We are grateful to the colleges and the reviewers for the constructive way in which they have approached reviews. In addition to publishing a report of each review, we will summarise the findings of reviews conducted since October 2004 in a second volume in the series, *Learning from higher education in further education colleges in England: Sharing good practice*. It will be available in November 2005.

For 2005-06, we have scheduled 36 reviews, and colleges have confirmed dates for initial meetings. This has allowed us to begin allocating review coordinators and appointing team members. As part of our support for colleagues in further education colleges (FECs), we have been briefing subject review facilitators as needed throughout the year and will provide another session in Gloucester in September. We will be running institutional briefing sessions for subject staff in June and July (Gloucester), September (Birmingham) and October (Gloucester).

If you have any queries, please contact [a.christou@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:a.christou@qaa.ac.uk), telephone 01452 557113; or [d.greenaway@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:d.greenaway@qaa.ac.uk), telephone 01452 557146.

**Alexa Christou**

## HE in FECs Liaison Group and Policy Advisory Forum

The Liaison Group and the Policy Advisory Forum both continue to provide valuable comment on QAA work. The Liaison Group is seeking ways of promoting and sharing good

practice in delivering HE in FECs. In *higher quality* 17, we reported on the Liaison Group's event, New Voices: Furthering Higher Education, which was held in October 2004. Copies of speakers' presentations and delegates' examples of their practice are available on our website at [www.qaa.ac.uk/education/heinfe/newvoices/programme](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/education/heinfe/newvoices/programme)

These presentations and statements of practice provide a wealth of ideas and information on the provision of HE in FECs. Topics include employer links, external examining, progression routes, student assessment, staff development, student support, and teaching and learning.

The Liaison Group is planning its next national conference, which will be held on 9 November 2005 at the East Midlands Conference Centre, Nottingham. There will be a mixture of plenary presentations and workshop activities to address the theme of partnerships. The conference has been planned for staff of HEIs, FECs, professional statutory and regulatory bodies, employers and sector skills councils. It will focus particularly on partnerships between HEIs and FECs, between HEIs, FECs and schools, and those between HEIs, FECs, employers and sector skills councils. Publicity material and booking forms will be available by the end of the summer term and you can find more information at [www.qaa.ac.uk/events](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/events). We hope you will be able to attend.

**Gillian Hayes**

## Feedback from the FEC workshops

The last issue of *higher quality* highlighted a series of workshops for FECs to support them in their work with the Academic Infrastructure. Workshops were held in the autumn term of 2004 and in March 2005.

In England, interest was very high and feedback indicates that the workshops were well received. Delegates reported that engagement with the Academic Infrastructure depends on a range of factors. These include relationships with HEIs; the difficulty of working with the Academic Infrastructure in an environment with many other demands; and varying levels of knowledge and understanding of the Academic Infrastructure's components. All saw the value of using the Academic

Infrastructure to support standards and quality of higher education provision in their colleges. Delegates asked for more opportunities to discuss and share practice on how the Academic Infrastructure is being used.

A similar event was held in Wales in March. Once again, the event was specifically for further education institutions and their partner HEIs. Although this event was attended by a smaller number of institutions, all of the participants welcomed it and, like their English counterparts, requested some follow-up. The focus of the discussions was on HEIs' engagement with the Academic Infrastructure and how this impacts

on their partner colleges. A workshop on progress files was also held, and more events are being planned to support further education institutions in Wales.

One of the requests from the FEC workshops was to have examples of programme specifications for Foundation Degrees and Higher National awards. This is being incorporated into the project considering the current guidelines on preparing programme specifications.

Feedback from the events can be found at [www.qaa.ac.uk/education/heinfo](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/education/heinfo)

**Wendy Stubbs**

## Foundation Degree reviews

---

Around 60 of the 70 Foundation Degree reviews are now under way, with 34 completed by the end of May. By mid-June, the reports of the earliest reviews will be published on our website. More will be published each week for the next few months. It has been fascinating to see the different ways in which Foundation Degrees are addressing flexibility for students and work-based learning. Universities and colleges are working with a range of employers, including the police, the Royal Navy, sports and fitness centres, schools, playgroups, care homes, the Press Association and many small and medium-sized enterprises.

In May 2005, we published the follow-up report of the 34 Foundation Degrees reviewed in 2002-03. We value the level of support from

providers for this and for our other Foundation Degree work. The report is available at [www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/foundationdegree](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/foundationdegree)

In April 2005, we organised a lively discussion group, consisting of representatives from institutions validating or offering Foundation Degrees converted from HNDs. The discussion will help to refine the emerging conclusions based on analysis of the desk-based survey, which focused on the characteristics of Foundation Degrees developed from HNCs and HNDs. The report will be published in autumn 2005.

For more information, please contact [p.mccracken@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:p.mccracken@qaa.ac.uk), telephone 01452 557172.

**Penny McCracken**

## Major review and other parts of the Partnership Quality Assurance Framework

---

Major reviews for the summer term 2004-05 have started and reports for the autumn 2004 visits have been published. The reviews are working well. However, there are two key issues that we would like healthcare providers to consider. The first is that we have insufficient speech and language therapist reviewers for the reviews. We would be grateful for nominations from practitioners and academics in this field of

healthcare. The second issue is that providers are not always following the guidance on the structure of the self-evaluation document. This is particularly important as the self-evaluation document is used as a basis for the review. We would be very grateful if you could refer to the structures outlined in the *Handbook for major review of healthcare programmes*.

The prototypes of the other quality assurance processes that form the Partnership Quality Assurance Framework (PQAF) are in full swing. The prototypes themselves come to an end in June. The focus will then move to the ongoing evaluative activity, as this important phase provides opportunities for partners and stakeholders to refine and develop these

processes before implementation. On 17 June, a national conference will provide the latest information on the prototype activities. All places have been taken, but watch this space for more information.

For more details please contact p.lerolland@qaa.ac.uk, telephone 01452 557018.

**Patricia Le Rolland**

## General Osteopathic Council reviews

QAA has been contracted to manage reviews of the statutory regulatory body for osteopathy, the General Osteopathic Council (GOsC). The first review ended in early March, with positive outcomes for the college reviewed and the operation of the method.

In 2005-06, there will be eight reviews, either for periodic renewal of recognition by GOsC, or for the monitoring of GOsC's new assessment arrangements. Therefore, in spring 2005 GOsC is planning with QAA:

- an evaluation of the early 2005 operation of review
- a revised review method handbook (August 2005)
- the 2005-06 schedule of review

- the selection and training (July 2005) of more osteopathic and lay visitors (see advert below)
- a second sector briefing for osteopathic education providers (August 2005)
- a review of the effect of national changes in clinical assessment requirements on the focus of GOsC review
- a revised annual report form for osteopathic education providers
- a revised procedure for application by colleges to receive initial recognition from GosC.

**Alan Bradshaw**

### GOsC reviews: request for visitors

GOsC reviews principally concern the education of students to meet the practice requirements of GOsC's *Standard 2000*. For 2005-06 reviews, GOsC is recruiting both osteopathic visitors and lay visitors.

Osteopathic visitors are qualified and recognised osteopaths with higher education interests. Lay visitors come from other professions and also normally have strong higher education experience.

Visitors are trained by QAA. Training for 2005-06 is a two-day residential course, to be held on 13-14 July 2005. Training will be preceded by a reading and analysis exercise and followed by practice report writing. GOsC reviews are conducted over four to six weeks and typically include a three-day visit to the college and programme under review.

Further details and application forms are available at [www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/appointments](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/appointments)

Informal enquiries to:

Alan Bradshaw - [a.bradshaw@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:a.bradshaw@qaa.ac.uk), telephone 01452 557163

Pat Cooper - [p.cooper@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:p.cooper@qaa.ac.uk), telephone 01452 557116

## Special review of research degree programmes

In 2005-06, there will be a special review for all HEIs in England, Wales and Northern Ireland that receive funding from HEFCE for research degree programmes (RDPs). HEIs need to demonstrate that they have robust and effective policies and procedures that secure and enhance the quality and standards of RDP provision. The review will draw upon the revised QAA *Code of practice* to evaluate current institutional practice.

At the beginning of February, a draft operational description and questionnaire was circulated, with a deadline for comments of April 22. We received 77 responses. Of these, 31 per cent were broadly content with the proposed operational description and provided no additional comments. The remaining responses raised various issues, including concerns about the

volume of work required to complete the questionnaire and the proposed use of HEFCE data on PhD completion rates. Other specific concerns included the link between the review and research funding; the timing of the review; the focus on the research environment and duplication of Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) activity. There were also questions about whether the review would apply to institutions without their own research degree-awarding powers.

We will give detailed consideration to all these points when we produce a final version of the guidance to institutions. The revised documents will be circulated by the end of September 2005. We will also evaluate the effectiveness of the review method in a pilot to be conducted early in the new academic year.

**Julian Ellis**

## Revisions to the *Code of practice*

The 10 sections of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* were originally published between January 1999 and September 2001. In *higher quality* 16 (October 2004), we reported on the reasons for revisions to the *Code of practice* and progress on sections 1, 2 and 4: Postgraduate research programmes; Collaborative provision, and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning); and External examining. These were published in August and September 2004.

The revision of Assessment of students (section six) and Recruitment and admissions (section 10) form part of this wider and ongoing review of individual sections of the *Code of practice*. They were originally published in May 2000 and September 2001 respectively. These editions are available at [www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/codeofpractice](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/codeofpractice)

### Assessment of students

To revise this section of the *Code of practice*, we are using a similar approach to last year. A working group has been convened, which combines expertise from across the UK in HEIs and other related organisations, including professional, statutory and regulatory bodies. We will be taking account of advice from the Better Regulation Task Force and its successor the Higher Education Regulation Review Group, replacing 'guidance' with 'explanations' that show why the precepts are important.

During the consultation process on the revised version, we will be holding two round table meetings in autumn 2005 and expect to publish an updated document early in 2006.

We look forward to receiving constructive and helpful comments from institutions and individuals on this section, as we have had in response to earlier consultations. We will do our best to use your comments to improve this section of the *Code of practice* and produce a document that will be useful to institutions in developing their assessment practices.

**Gill Clarke**

## Recruitment and admissions

We have convened an advisory group (comprising experts and practitioners in recruitment and admissions) and held round table discussion meetings with higher education sector and stakeholder representatives to help us revise this section of the *Code of practice*. One of the most notable developments in recruitment and admissions since the original publication, discussed by the advisory group and at round table meetings, has been the Admissions to Higher Education Review. A steering group, chaired by Professor Steven Schwartz, was asked to conduct an independent review of the options that English institutions providing higher education should consider in assessing the merit of applicants for their courses. The final report of this review, *Fair admissions to higher education: recommendations for good practice* (the 'Schwartz report') is available at [www.admissions-review.org.uk/downloads/finalreport.pdf](http://www.admissions-review.org.uk/downloads/finalreport.pdf)

All precepts in the current version remain valid in light of the recommendations of the Schwartz report, but in the review and revision process additional attention may need to be given to: descriptions and explanations of fairness; the explicitness of entry criteria and the consistency of their application; transparency in the recruitment, selection and admission processes; and the procedures HEIs have in place for monitoring and revising their recruitment, selection and admission procedures.

Queries have been raised about the timing of our review of this section of the *Code of practice*, in light of the recommendations in the Schwartz report to investigate Post-Qualification Admission (PQA) systems. We have given this issue careful consideration and believe that, on balance, it is appropriate to review this section of the *Code of practice* at this time because:

- this activity forms part of a wider review of the *Code of practice*
- there has been significant development in recruitment and admissions since the original publication in 2001, which should be reflected in our publications
- many of the precepts and explanatory text will be equally applicable within a PQA system (for example, monitoring and review of recruitment, selection, admission and enrolment policies and procedures)
- several PQA systems and models are currently being investigated. No decision has yet been taken on whether, or indeed which PQA systems would be most beneficial to the higher education sector.

Discussions at the advisory group and round table meetings have suggested that the current title of Recruitment and admissions is misleading. The proposal is to change the title to Admission to higher education. During summer 2005, we hope to consult with the sector and stakeholders on a draft version of the revised section.

**Jayne Mitchell**

## Programme specifications



In summer 2004 a survey was carried out, through the liaison role, of the use and development of programme specifications in

HEIs in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The response was excellent. The detail provided encouraged a project to consider whether the current *Guidelines for preparing programme specifications*, and particularly the examples contained in them, should be refreshed.

The project, which began in December 2004, used the information gleaned from the survey, liaison file notes, outcomes from institutional audit and outcomes from developmental engagements, among other sources. We held two regional meetings to test ideas for refreshing the *Guidelines* and also to provide a discussion forum.

The debates at these two meetings echoed our original ideas of the kind of themes that the project needed to address (audience, purpose etc) and the kind of areas that any refreshment of the examples should cover (joint honours, joint degrees, postgraduate degrees etc). The outcomes of the two meetings then fed into the final planning for the first annual liaison conference, which was held in London on 20 April (see photo). The conference was very well attended and gave us access to views on programme specifications from a wide cross-section of the sector. This confirmed our view that there is a wealth of experience on which to draw in this area and also that there is a variety of purposes for programme specifications.

Among the key themes discussed at the conference were: the purpose of and audience for the programme specification; the developmental nature of the programme specification and the challenges that this entails; how far students have been involved in and consulted on the development of programme specifications; and the encouragement to make any future version of the *Guidelines* a more dynamic document.

A note on the outcomes of the conference will be sent to all participants. This note will provide a basis for discussion about the future direction of the project and how we should fulfil the objective of refreshing the *Guidelines*.

**Fiona Crozier**

## Credit arrangements for England

---

As announced in the last edition of *higher quality* (page 8), the Measuring and Recording Student Achievement Steering Group - chaired by Professor Bob Burgess - has asked us to develop some proposals for it to consider for possible credit arrangements for England. While many English HEIs have extensive experience in the use of credit, either individually or within consortia, there are no national higher education arrangements, unlike in Wales and Scotland.

The development of any national credit arrangements for England will need to take account of existing higher education activities. These include progression issues arising through the HEFCE Lifelong Learning Networks

initiatives; the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) proposals for a Framework of Achievement, and the Learning and Skills Council/QCA credit developments; and UK and international activities, such as those emerging through the Bologna Process (see page 3).

An extensive range of discussions is taking place. We are conducting a telephone survey of a sample of those English HEIs that did not respond to the recent Joint Credit Consortia survey. The Steering Group has asked for a series of options to be presented at its July meeting. It will use these options to set out a consultation for the sector and others, which is due to take place in the autumn.

**Nick Harris**  
**Jayne Mitchell**

## Quality Strategy Network conference

---

As announced in *higher quality* 17, the theme for the Quality Strategy Network's founding conference is, 'How can the links between quality assurance and enhancement be strengthened in the next rounds of audit and review?'

The conference will take place on 4-5 July at Woburn House, London. The keynote speakers

are Dame Sandra Burslem (Vice-Chancellor, Manchester Metropolitan University and Chair of the Quality Assurance Framework Review Group); Professor Paul Ramsden (Chief Executive, The Higher Education Academy) and Peter Williams, Chief Executive of QAA.

In addition to the keynote addresses, there will be four 'Exchange sessions' over the two days, fulfilling the Network's intention to be a knowledge exchange between members. Watch out, too, for a session of 'Quality speed dating', organised by Dr Simon Merrywest of the University of Manchester!

If you would like to attend, please contact [s.melvin@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:s.melvin@qaa.ac.uk)

**David Cairns**

## QAA in Wales

QAA continues to strengthen its presence in Wales. The programme of institutional reviews, with its distinctive 'Wales method', is well under way and reports on the federal University of Wales and the University of Wales, Newport have been published. Team Wales continues to meet regularly. It provides an important internal forum for QAA to focus on the particular context of its activities in Wales. This single point of reference within QAA ensures that all its operations are sensitive to the unique nature of the higher education sector in Wales.

Good working relationships with individual universities and colleges continue to develop through our liaison officers scheme. There are also regular meetings with other key organisations related to higher education in Wales. We plan to liaise more closely with Estyn (Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales) and seek to coordinate the respective activities of both bodies in the higher

education sector in Wales. QAA officers have also visited further education colleges that provide higher education programmes. A successful seminar was recently held in Cardiff to assist staff in further education colleges to understand the work of QAA. See page 8 for more information.

Finally, we will be holding our annual subscribers' meeting on 14 June in Cardiff. This event takes place in a different location each year and this is the first time it is being held in Wales. We are very pleased to announce that Jane Davidson AM, Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning at the National Assembly for Wales, will be giving a presentation on how the Assembly regards HEIs in Wales within its overall policy objectives. We hope that institutions that have been invited, both from within Wales and across the UK, will find the presentation informative and take this opportunity to engage in productive dialogue with the Minister.

**Mike Laugharne**

## Evaluating the Quality Enhancement Framework in Scottish higher education

### A new approach to quality

When the Scottish higher education community embarked on a new approach to quality early in 2003, it made two initial decisions. First, the future approach should be based on guiding principles carved out of both past experience and our understanding of the processes of effective learning in higher education. Secondly, we should continue to reflect on the effectiveness of the new approach after its introduction. This would enable us to refine the

processes and hopefully move into a phase of constructive evolution of a supportive system. To assist with this second aim, the new Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF) built in a variety of transparent internal and external monitoring and evaluation strategies. One element of this was the commissioning of an external evaluation of the QEF over the first three years of operation. The team that won the contract (led by Professor Murray Saunders) came from the Centre for the Study of Education and Training, Department of Educational Research, Lancaster

University and the Institute of Educational Technology, the Open University. In March 2005, the second annual progress report from the team was delivered to the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (SHEFC). The report is published on the SHEFC website. This article reflects on some of the matters raised by the ongoing evaluation.

The Evaluation Report addresses the challenges of identifying appropriate indicators for the performance of the QEF. It is clear from this section of the report, and related discussions, that meaningful consideration of indicators can only take place in the context of the main founding principles of the QEF. These founding principles included the creation of an approach to quality that was:

- based on partnership - between the sector, the student bodies, QAA and SHEFC
- built on the key role of students as active participants in the creation of their own skills, knowledge and understanding
- forward-looking, based on enhancement as opposed to inspection and box-ticking
- founded on evidence-based practice, both contributing to and drawing on international good practice.

We continue to monitor and refine the approach through a range of fora. These include the oversight of the QEF by the Quality Working Group (involving QAA, Universities Scotland, the National Union of Students [Scotland] and SHEFC); the interaction of stakeholders in the Universities Scotland Teaching Quality Forum; and the quarterly joint meetings of QAA and sparqs (Student Participation in Quality Scotland) with all student associations. The first annual Evaluation Report stated that, through such mechanisms, the QEF had the 'support of the overwhelming majority of the stakeholders'.

## Enhancement-led institutional review

In relation to enhancement-led institutional review (ELIR), the evaluators note that the matters they had raised previously regarding reviewer training have been followed through and that 'reviewers in training', both staff from across the UK and students, are well prepared for the task. The feedback from institutions in

relation to their preparation of the Reflective Analysis (RA) confirms the outcome of our own monitoring: it remains a time-consuming activity, but it provides a good return on the time invested. The evaluators state that, 'producing the RA is generally seen as a very useful and productive process. In one university, the processes used to develop the RA have been kept in place within the institution as staff found them so useful. In some cases, developing the RA has brought together for the first time staff who would not otherwise have worked together in a common working group'.

In general, the ELIR process is seen as positive and a 'definite improvement on the previous system'. Those who have been reviewed have reported that the process is much more constructive and less adversarial - in particular Part Two of the review. One passing comment made to the evaluators, on which they will take additional soundings, is that periodic institutional reviews may not be entirely suited to an enhancement agenda. The reason given by the evaluators for suggesting this is that, 'a continuing relationship between a review panel and an institution could favour enhancement in a way that an event cannot'. We will also reflect on this in the context of the overall QEF framework, including the role of the annual discussion between institutions and QAA.

Feedback through QAA's own monitoring in relation to the early ELIR reports suggested that the style of reporting might be further refined to reflect the enhancement-led nature of the process. In discussion with the Quality Working Group, a number of changes in tone and style have been introduced from the current academic year. Before leaving ELIR, it is also important to note that the evaluators do not make specific comment in this report in relation to student reviewers. From our own experience, monitoring and feedback, this initiative continues to work well and the student role in ELIR remains an important element of the QEF.

## Enhancement Themes

One of the defining features of the QEF, and indeed of the role of QAA Scotland, is the Enhancement Themes. These themes are a key way through which the approach to quality in Scotland is founded on enhancement of the

learning experience available to students. By the end of July 2005, the final outcomes from the first two themes ('Assessment' and 'Responding to Student Needs') will be published. QAA Scotland has had very helpful and productive discussions with The Higher Education Academy, among other things, about taking these themes forward at a subject level, through the Academy's network of Subject Centres.

Work on the current themes ('Flexible Delivery' and 'Employability') is progressing well. It is interesting to note the variety of different methodologies adopted by the steering groups for the different themes, involving commissioned research and development work, open workshops and seminars, targeted development work through specific institutional contacts, focus groups and joint activities with student associations.

In all areas, there has been significant international involvement, which has allowed colleagues in Scotland to reflect on interesting international practice. In many cases, individual institutions have taken advantage of the presence of our international guests to host workshops. To date, there have been contributions from colleagues based in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, USA, France and Finland. There has also been involvement of a group of students from the National Union of Students in Europe. One of the impacts of these developments is the growing international awareness of good practice in Scotland. In relation to this, Dr Alan Davidson (University of Dundee) recently accepted an invitation from Japan to present the work of the Enhancement Themes in the context of the overall QEF (see page 16).

While there has been student involvement in all the themes, and indeed some events and activities run jointly with student bodies, we are currently examining different ways of increasing student involvement in this work. In addition, the first external Evaluation Report noted that some concerns had been expressed regarding the timescale for each theme and the potential for overload in the system. QAA Scotland has been in discussion with the Quality Working Group partners regarding this matter for some time. We have now agreed a revised approach to the themes, based on a five-year rolling plan of topic themes, at the heart of which is an

ongoing, systemic theme. The systemic theme committee will oversee both the timely unfolding of the topic themes and the annual updating of the five-year plan. In addition, the systemic theme committee will engage with the issues of managing quality enhancement at the institutional level. Because of the centrality of this committee to the whole QEF, its membership will largely comprise the HEI vice principals (or equivalent) with responsibility for learning and teaching, together with representatives of students associations. The first meeting of the systemic theme committee - under the chairmanship of Professor Kenneth Miller, Vice Principal at the University of Strathclyde - will be in July 2005. Full details of the new approach are provided in the annex to SHEFC's Circular letter HE/11/05 (25 April 2005).

### Mid-term report on the QEF

Overall, the feedback from our external evaluators confirms the findings from our own formal and informal monitoring and evaluation: the QEF is developing well from its founding principles and taking us in important and exciting new directions. So, how might our mid-term report read? I suppose it would be along the lines of, 'a promising start, on the right lines...but always room for improvement'. But then, that's what it's all about.

## Taking the Scottish QEF to Japan



An American participant at a recent Enhancement Themes conference was impressed by the Scottish approach to managing quality. He recommended that this approach should be featured, along with examples from the USA and Australia, in a series of international keynote presentations he had been invited to give in Japan. Dr Alan Davidson, Director of Quality Assurance at the University of Dundee and a member of QAA Scotland Committee, accepted the invitation on our behalf (see photo above). In March 2005, he presented the Scottish QEF

at four conferences in Japan. These conferences involved senior academics, managers, researchers and policy-makers in Japanese higher education.

Dr Davidson indicated that discussion sessions highlighted particular Japanese interest in key aspects of the Scottish approach, including:

- external accountability that emphasises enhancement
- the partnership model, involving SHEFC, QAA, HEIs and student representatives
- the collective approach to supporting capacity development through the Quality Enhancement Themes
- the centrality of students, in particular the idea of student members on institutional review teams.

The Scottish-Japanese dialogue continues electronically.

**Norman Sharp**

## Access to Higher Education

### Development activity

We continue with our work to bring greater consistency and transparency to the Access to HE qualification. Last year, our research project confirmed that for those validating and providing Access to HE courses in further education, and for those receiving Access students in higher education, consistency in the description of student achievement was the most important area for attention. We have, therefore, addressed this as a priority and, following further research and development work this year, we have recently published a set of proposals for consultation on a common credit framework for Access to HE. The proposals take account of other recent developments in credit and set out details of how a credit system for Access might operate. The adoption of such a common system for describing achievement would allow greater

commonality in the specification for the award. This consultation document proposes consistency in the required credit achievement and common nomenclature for the Access to HE qualification itself.

The consultation document (*Recognising achievement on Access to Higher Education programmes*) and response form are available on our website at [www.qaa.ac.uk/access/creditconsultations](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/access/creditconsultations)

We would encourage institutions and individuals to let us have their reactions to the proposals and suggest areas in which they think further development would be most valuable. The closing date for responses is 15 July.

While we are committed to demonstrating consistency of standards for the nationally recognised Access to HE qualification,

we also continue to support the mechanisms of the current Access Recognition Scheme, through which Access to HE courses are developed by further and higher education institutions working together to identify and respond to local needs. The new licensing criteria for authorised validating agencies (AVAs), the awarding bodies at the heart of the Access Recognition Scheme, introduce a more explicit developmental role, with greater responsibility for regional responsiveness. We hope that this will encourage AVAs to facilitate more innovation for Access to HE and have more direct involvement in cross-sector initiatives for widening participation. The new criteria will be introduced from September and will be published as part of the revised documentation for the QAA Recognition Scheme for Access to HE.

## New programme of AVA reviews

From 2006, the new AVA licensing criteria will be the primary reference point for AVA licensing and review activities. Since we embarked on the previous round of reviews in 1998, AVAs have grown in their size and in the scope of their activity. We expect this trend to continue over the next two years, with a series of planned AVA mergers. The development of the review method, which has formed the other major aspect of QAA's work in Access during the current year, has taken account of the likelihood that, in most circumstances, we will be reviewing much larger organisations. As well as increasing the size of review teams, we have restructured the review visit and AVAs will be directly involved in planning the programme for the review visit. The new round of AVA reviews will start in summer 2006.

For more information, please contact k.dentith@qaa.ac.uk, telephone 01452 557109.

**Kath Dentith**

## Annual reception 2005



On the evening of 15 March, we held our annual reception at the British Library in London. QAA's *Annual Report 2003-04* was launched at the reception.

Around 100 guests heard Sam Younger, Chair of the QAA Board, introduce the guest of honour, the Right Honourable Dr Kim Howells MP, Minister of State for Lifelong Learning (see photo above).

Kim Howells departed from his prepared speech to talk about a recent visit to China. He stressed the importance of being able to tell international contacts that the UK has an independent body that monitors standards and quality in higher education.

Peter Williams reviewed the seven years of QAA's existence, noting that we are now established as part of the higher education scene. He warned of the possible risks to academic quality of the forthcoming Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), as some HEIs may be diverted from their teaching mission in their chase for better RAE grades. For the future, QAA is doing more work in international higher education; is at the forefront of Europe, influencing and reporting back; and is expanding the UK's influence around the world.

**Ian Spencer**

## Strategic plan 2006-11

---

QAA's current strategic plan covers the three years 2003-05. Later this year, we will review our achievements against that plan and put a report on our website.

We have started to develop the next strategic plan, covering 2006-11. QAA's Board of Directors has developed an outline structure for the plan and a timetable for its development. There have also been preliminary discussions about QAA's medium to long-term strategic goals within the Board and with our key partners in the funding and representative bodies.

The articulation of our strategic goals will be influenced by a number of important developments within our planning environment. These include, for example: the evolution of

review and audit processes, in the light of experience and external evaluation and the requirements in the different countries of the UK; the evolution of the Academic Infrastructure; the drive for better regulation coming through the work of the Higher Education Regulation Review Group; the implications of the Bologna Process and other European and international developments; and the evolution of QAA as an organisation. We will consult the sector and other interested parties on a draft of the new strategic plan later this year. We aim to publish the plan in January 2006.

**Martin Johnson**

## Changes to QAA's Board of Directors

---

QAA is a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity. Our Board of Directors has 14 members: four appointed by the higher education representative bodies, four by the higher education funding bodies and six by the Board itself.

Three Board members - Professor Peter McKie, Mr Graham Mackenzie and Professor Philip Robinson - retired from the Board in 2004 in accordance with the company's Articles of Association. The new Board members who have joined are: Dr Susan Atkins, Chief Executive, Independent Police Complaints Commission; Mr Andrew Ramsay,

Executive Director, Engineering Council UK; and Professor Elaine Thomas, Director, Surrey Institute of Art and Design, University College.

The Board has also invited two new observers to attend its meetings. They are Professor Paul Ramsden, Chief Executive of The Higher Education Academy and Mr Andre Oboler, a postgraduate student at the University of Lancaster. Andre has succeeded Ms Natasha Hirst as the student observer.

The Board was pleased to welcome them all to their first meeting in March 2005.

**Martin Johnson**

---

## Conferences and events

### Scottish enhancement

Contact [enhancement@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:enhancement@qaa.ac.uk)  
[www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk](http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk)

|                   |  |  |
|-------------------|--|--|
| 13 June 2005      | The QEF in Scotland: workshop for professional and statutory bodies                        | University of Edinburgh                        |
| 21 June 2005      | Employability: Getting to Grips with Employability (ii)                                    | John MacIntyre Centre, University of Edinburgh |
| 21 July 2005      | Enhancing student employability: workforce development in the public and voluntary sectors | Stirling Management Centre                     |
| 27-28 July 2005   | Enhancing practice for student learning (joint event with sparqs)                          | Apex Hotel, Dundee                             |
| 20 September 2005 | Employability: institutional contacts network conference                                   | University of Edinburgh                        |

### Other events

Contact [subscribers@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:subscribers@qaa.ac.uk)

|              |  |         |
|--------------|--|---------|
| 14 June 2005 | Annual subscribers' meeting (invitation only)<br>10:30 - 16:15 | Cardiff |
|--------------|--|---------|

Contact [health@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:health@qaa.ac.uk)

|              |   |        |
|--------------|---|--------|
| 17 June 2005 | National Conference on the Partnership Quality Assurance Framework for healthcare education | London |
|--------------|---|--------|

Contact [s.melvin@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:s.melvin@qaa.ac.uk)

|                  |   |                      |
|------------------|---|----------------------|
| 20 June 2005     | Round table meeting on joint master's degrees             | Woburn House, London |
| 4-5 July 2005    | Quality Strategy Network launch                           |                      |
| 7 September 2005 | National Union of Students conference: Quality Takes Time |                      |

Contact [j.reffin@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:j.reffin@qaa.ac.uk)

|                 |                                |  |
|-----------------|--------------------------------|--|
| 9 November 2005 | HE in FECs national conference | East Midlands Conference Centre, University Park, Nottingham |
|-----------------|--------------------------------|--|

## QAA publications

| Date      | Publication  |
|-----------|--|
| May 2005  | <p>Access consultation on the HE qualification framework (web only) - deadline for responses 15 July</p> <p>Outcomes from institutional audit papers: <i>Programme specifications; External examiners and their reports; Initial overview</i> (web only)</p> <p>Foundation Degree follow-up survey</p> <p><i>How do I find the best course for me?</i> (joint publication with UCAS)</p> |
| June 2005 | <p><i>The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education: a guide for international students</i> (in English, Arabic, Chinese and Spanish)</p> <p><i>Quality assurance in UK higher education: a guide for international readers</i> (in English)</p> <p><i>Enhancing practice: Assessment</i></p> <p><i>Enhancing practice: Student Needs</i></p>  |
| July 2005 | <p>Enhancement Themes - <i>Reflections on Assessment</i> (volumes 1 and 2)</p> <p>Enhancement Themes - <i>Responding to Student Needs</i></p> <p><i>Quality Assurance News for healthcare education</i> - No 7</p>   |

### QAA 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)

### QAA website

QAA's publications are available at [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)

Please email [hqfeedback@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:hqfeedback@qaa.ac.uk) if you would like to comment on *higher quality*, or receive the email alert which includes links to the electronic version of this publication.

### Additional copies

Printed copies of *higher quality* are available free of charge from:

Linney Direct, Adamsway, Mansfield NG18 4FN  
 Telephone 01623 450788, Fax 01623 450629  
 Email [qaa@linneydirect.com](mailto:qaa@linneydirect.com)