

Autumn digging



This autumn is a significant time in the development of the work of QAA. The recently published report of phase one of the review of the Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) in England gave a gratifyingly clean bill of health to our work over the last few years in institutional audit. The Quality Enhancement Framework is now well embedded in the Scottish higher education world and the first fruits of both ELIR and the Enhancement Themes suggest that the intentions of the new Scottish arrangements are well on the way to being achieved. And in Wales, where there is a lively discussion about the structure and function of higher education as a whole, the new institutional review process is providing an effective basis for underpinning expectations of standards and quality.

Despite this good progress we are far from complacent, conscious that there remains much work to be done and many challenges to be met. We shall be doing plenty of autumn digging.

The QAF report proposed some changes to both the objectives and the processes that we might use in the next round of audits beginning in 2007. I have little doubt that these proposals offer QAA an opportunity to make further evolutionary progress towards our goal of making quality assurance in higher education a valuable and valued part of the professional academic environment. We shall be publishing and consulting on our proposals later in October. In our work on higher education provided in further education colleges in England and in our development of the Access to HE

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recognition scheme, we are reviewing and revising what we do, in order to ensure that we are meeting the needs of students, institutions and the wider public in the most effective and least burdensome ways possible.

Increasingly QAA's horizons have to be extended beyond our national boundaries. The diversity of traditions, understandings and expectations seen among our European partners raises the question of what might be a reasonable and achievable level of convergence among national systems in the longer run. The recent Bergen communiqué and the European Commission's draft recommendation on quality assurance in higher education have both added momentum to this debate. The UK's European Presidency conference on higher education, held in Manchester earlier in October, allowed us to use the UK's quality assurance approaches as an illustration of how national diversity, institutional variety and autonomy - and the public interest - can all be reconciled, through an effective and efficient means of assuring academic standards and quality.

Peter Williams
Chief Executive



Peter has been elected President of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). See page 16 for more information.

Transitional period in England and Northern Ireland 2002-05

The beginning of the academic year 2005-06 represents an important turning point in the life of QAA. Although the last 11 transitional period audits will be completed in the first half of 2005-06, this year marks the end of a three-year period of intensive activity, covering institutional audit and the completion of a wide-ranging programme of engagements with institutions at the discipline level, including a selected number of subject reviews. This activity was referred to as the 'transitional arrangements'. It was designed to provide a comprehensive coverage of review and development activity, at both institution and discipline level, to assure public interest in the standards and quality of higher education and to encourage the continuing improvement of quality systems within institutions.

Institutional audit

The new academic year also marks the development of a revised approach to institutional audit, following the recommendations from the Quality Assurance Framework Review Group (the Burslem Group). The Burslem Group has completed the first phase of its review. Its findings and recommendations were published by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) in July 2005 [HEFCE 2005/35]. The QAF report includes an evaluation of the impacts, benefits and costs of institutional audit and the transitional arrangements. It states that the processes were generally cost effective and worked well. Recommendations include various developments and refinements. These should improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the institutional audit process as a means for assuring standards and quality, and for promoting enhancement.

The evaluation has highlighted key issues for consideration in the development of the next cycle of audits. There are initiatives that have worked well and can be developed in the new process, such as the greater involvement of students, the opportunity for dialogue with institutions and the better management of information. Points for further consideration include the need to look at the nature of QAA's engagement with institutions and the procedural arrangements for audit. The QAF report identified a tendency for unnecessary over-preparation for QAA activities and a preoccupation with the 'management' of the event. This needs to be addressed through an approach that recognises the developmental and enhancement value of the processes and stresses the benefits of peer evaluation. Audit is a process that begins with institutional self-evaluation and concludes with the implementation of the recommendations from the review.

Developmental engagements

Developmental engagements were intended to provide continuing evidence of the standards and quality of academic programmes in the period between the discontinuation of subject review and the full implementation of the revised institutional audit process. They gave an opportunity for QAA to work with institutions to test their internal quality systems and prepare for institutional audit. Teams included institutional members and the outcomes were reported back to the institution. There were no published reports. Although HEIs had some misgivings about the process in the early stages, it promoted a genuinely developmental approach to review and encouraged an informed dialogue between review teams and subject staff about strategies for quality enhancement. These lessons have been noted in the discussions about future methods. They will influence the plans for the next cycle of audit and the proposals for the next stage of the review of higher education in further education colleges. Proposals for a new method in further education colleges, which will integrate both subject and institutional level review, have a focus on developing the capacity of subject teams to manage the standards and quality of programmes.

Academic review

Similarly, the selected programme of academic reviews of subjects in HEIs confirmed the generally robust nature of quality arrangements at discipline level. The reviews highlighted the effective use of the Academic Infrastructure in setting and maintaining academic standards, the positive impact of research on the students' learning opportunities, the high quality of much of the teaching and learning activity and the excellent academic and personal support for students. Areas for continuing development included the relationship between module and programme outcomes, the timeliness and consistency of feedback to students on assessed work, the arrangements for student progression and retention and the dissemination of good practice in the quality of teaching. These are issues that are typically included within the remit for internal review by institutions. Where appropriate, institutional audit will provide the opportunity for institutions to demonstrate how they have monitored and addressed concerns in these areas.

Sharing what we've learnt

Since 2002, a lot has been learnt about the effectiveness of institutional systems for quality assurance and the commitment to enhancing students' learning opportunities. QAA has disseminated these messages through *Learning from developmental engagements*, the *Summary report on the academic review of subjects in HEIs* and the new series of papers on the outcomes from institutional audit (see page 4).

Reshaping audit

The main influences on reshaping institutional audit will be the Burslem Group recommendations and the discussions that took place on risk, proportionality, quality enhancement, student involvement, developments in Europe, internationalisation of higher education and the possible effects of variable fees.

We are working on a new operational description for audit. This will be circulated to institutions and other relevant organisations in late autumn 2005. In spring 2006, we will publish the revised *Handbook for institutional audit* and the next cycle of audits will start in 2006-07.

The principal difference will be the replacement of discipline audit trails with a more flexible audit trail methodology - exploring in more detail how institutional quality assurance systems work in practice. But the new method will also address issues to do with the selection

and training of auditors and audit secretaries, the interaction between the audit team and the institution, the student voice and students' involvement in quality assurance and the production and presentation of public information. At first glance it may not look radically different to the current method. However, its development and implementation should provide the opportunity to create a more productive and less intrusive model of institutional review.

Stephen Jackson

More outcomes from institutional audit

In *higher quality* 18 (June 2005), we announced the publication of the first three outcomes from institutional audit papers - *Initial overview; Programme specifications* and *External examiners and their reports*. Since June, the team producing the papers has been expanded to include more QAA colleagues and five experienced institutional auditors. With this team the first series of outcomes papers, drawn from the first 70 institutional audit reports, should be completed by the end of January 2006. Then we will start a second series of papers, based on the remaining 71 reports for audits conducted in 2004-05 and 2005-06. We will start to publish this series from May/June 2006.

By the end of November, there will be four more papers covering: *Staff support and development; Learning support arrangements (including VLEs); Academic guidance, support and supervision arrangements for students; and*

Validation and approval, and periodic review. These can be found at www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/institutionalaudit/outcomes

When we started to design and produce the papers, we intended to make the very useful information within institutional audit reports more accessible to colleagues across the sector. Even at this early stage in the project, we have already received some helpful feedback from colleagues in institutions on the usefulness of the papers. Later in the year, we will be using a more systematic approach and analysis on their usefulness. If you have found the outcomes papers helpful, we would like to hear from you. Also, if there is a particular topic that you would like to see covered in the papers, please let us know.

For more information please contact d.cairns@qaa.ac.uk, telephone 01452 557106.

David Cairns

Collaborative provision audit

Collaborative provision audit: Supplement to the Handbook for institutional audit: England, describes this review process and is available on our website. This is the first process we have developed specifically for collaborative provision for some time. Earlier this year, we conducted the first two collaborative provision audits and a further 21 audits are scheduled for 2005-06.

The process involves a briefing visit and an audit visit at the awarding institution. There are also visits to a small sample of partner institutions. Teams do not visit overseas partners but they conduct 'virtual visits', where appropriate, using video conferencing. We have met both audit teams since the first two audits to discuss the process and we are reassured that it works effectively.

For both of the audits we asked for a small number of 'desk-based studies', which consisted of paper trails illustrating some specific links. The aim of these studies was to give the team an opportunity to read through the history of a particular partnership as an example of the awarding institution's partnership arrangements. These desk-based studies helped the team and, consequently, we intend to continue this approach in 2005-06.

We have recruited all the auditors we need to date, and aim to put together teams with knowledge of institutional systems and experience of collaborative provision. All team members will be invited to attend a training event.

As always we will be seeking feedback and evaluation. Any comments on the process should be sent to n.channon@qaa.ac.uk, telephone 01452 557104.

Nicola Channon

Higher education in further education colleges

Academic review of subjects

In 2004-05, 37 reviews were completed. Although the majority received positive outcomes, there were six 'no confidence' judgements for academic standards; four of these also had 'failing' judgements for the quality of learning opportunities. Consequently in 2005-06 there may be six re-reviews. There was also a re-review that recorded a second 'no confidence' judgement.

For 2005-06, 35 reviews have been scheduled. In September, we held briefing sessions for the review facilitators and subject leaders that will be carrying out these visits. Subject reviewers and facilitators also attended an evaluation seminar. This was an opportunity to give feedback about the 2004-05 reviews process. We are very grateful for the comments received, which we can draw upon to improve the process over the next academic year.

New method of review

Some of you have heard Gillian Hayes (Head of Operations in QAA's Reviews Group) speaking at various events this year. She has discussed the principles of the new review method for higher education in further education colleges (HE in FECs) in England. This has been our first opportunity to design a method specifically for HE in FECs. An important starting point for the

development of this new method has been an analysis of the comments about current review methods from FECs that provide higher education, their partner awarding bodies and their representative bodies.

The proposed method - integrated quality and enhancement review (IQER) - has two interrelated components, developmental review and summative review. Developmental review is designed to help colleges and their partner awarding bodies by offering constructive comment on aspects of the college's management and procedures for the quality assurance of their higher education programmes. Summative review will result in a published report and judgements similar to those of institutional audit for HEIs in England and Northern Ireland. We are also aiming to design IQER so that it will contribute comment and evidence to Ofsted and the Adult Learning Inspectorate for college inspection.

Implementation will await the Foster Review of Further Education in October 2005. The new method will be piloted in early 2006 with a roll out of a full review programme from 2007-08. This timing allows HEFCE and others to consider the findings of the Foster report. Institutions will have an opportunity to comment on the method when it goes out to consultation in early 2006.

Penny McCracken

Higher Education Further 2005

Partnerships

Wednesday 9 November 2005, East Midlands Conference Centre, Nottingham

Draft programme

1000-1015	Coffee and registration
Morning session:	Chair - Peter Williams, Chief Executive, QAA
1015-1025	Introduction, welcome
1025-1045	Learning from academic review of HE in FECs 2003-05 Dr Stephen Jackson, Director of Reviews, QAA Presentation followed by questions
1045-1130	The context for sustaining and developing HE partnerships Keynote speaker: Sir Alan Wilson FBA, Director General for Higher Education, Department for Education and Skills Presentation followed by questions
1140-1230	Parallel sessions Group work themed around different kinds of partnerships, such as HE providers' partnerships with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● employers ● Sector Skills Councils ● schools ● other HEIs and/or other FECs
1230-1330	Lunch and poster session
Afternoon session:	Chair - Susan Hayday, Curriculum and Higher Education Manager, Association of Colleges
1330-1420	Good practice in partnerships Keynote speakers: Professor John Coyne, Vice Chancellor, University of Derby and John Widdowson, Principal, New College Durham Presentations followed by questions
1430-1530	Seminar groups Group work to discuss topics developed from morning parallel sessions
1530-1600	New QAA method for the review of HE in FECs Gillian Hayes, Head of Operations, QAA Presentation followed by questions
1600	Sum up and close of conference

Higher Education Further Conference

On Wednesday 9 November 2005, we will be holding the second national one-day conference, arranged by the HE in FEC Liaison Group: *Higher Education Further*. The conference will bring together FECs, HEIs, national agencies and employers. The conference theme is partnership. It has been planned in consultation with the Association of Colleges and HEFCE, and will complement their recent conferences.

The event will take place at the East Midlands Conference Centre, University Park, Nottingham.

The principal speakers include Sir Alan Wilson (Director General for Higher Education, Department for Education and Skills), Professor

John Coyne (Vice-Chancellor, University of Derby) and John Widdowson (Principal, New College Durham). There will be parallel sessions offering the chance to debate with national agencies, and workshops on themes of good practice in delivering higher education through partnership arrangements. We hope these themes will be of interest to a wide range of staff in both HEIs and FECs.

Further information and application forms are available at www.qaa.ac.uk/education/heinfe/conference05. Enquiries can be made by contacting the National Conference Bookings Team at conference@qaa.ac.uk, telephone 01452 557132.

Jackie Reffin

Foundation Degree reviews

The Foundation Degree review programme is almost complete. By mid-October, around two-thirds of the reports will be published. We hope that these are already useful to institutions and others interested in the development of Foundation Degrees. We are continuing to work with Foundation Degree Forward on the dissemination of the outcomes of the reviews. It is interesting to see the different ways in which universities and colleges are addressing similar challenges, despite the variation between employment sectors. There is plenty of good practice to be shared.

We are grateful to specialist reviewers and facilitators who took part in the reviews and attended one of our three lively evaluation events

in July and October. These have given us the opportunity to confirm or amend the findings from the questionnaires completed by all participants in each review. We will evaluate how these reviews have worked and identify features that can be used for other review methods.

We are working on the overview report, to be published in December 2005, which identifies the main patterns from the reviews. In November 2005, the report of the Foundation Degrees converted from HNDs will be published.

For more information, please contact p.mccracken@qaa.ac.uk, telephone 01452 557172.

Penny McCracken

Major review and other parts of the Partnership Quality Assurance Framework

Major reviews have been completed for the summer term 2005. We have selected teams for autumn 2005 and scheduled reviews for spring 2006. We are also producing the second review trends report, which will be published by the end of the year. This report will enable stakeholders to read about the judgements reached so far. It will include a statistical analysis of the student data on achievement and progression and an analysis of the key findings from published major review reports. The intention is that a further cumulative review trends report, published in 2006, will report on current outcomes and the learning points from this cycle of reviews. These, combined with the individual major review reports, should assure the public and potential students that they are fully informed on the standards and quality of NHS-funded healthcare provision in England.

On 17 June, we held the second national conference on the Partnership Quality Assurance Framework (PQAF). The conference included presentations on the emerging messages from the prototypes in approval and ongoing quality monitoring and enhancement. We presented the key early findings of QAA's evaluation of the prototypes to all delegates. There were also seven workshops that allowed delegates to explore issues in more depth. The most popular workshop was an update on major review.



QAA's Health team, organisers of the national conference

The next steps for the PQAF include a period of discussion, debate and reflection on the best way forward. The partners - including the regulatory bodies and stakeholders - will consider QAA's evaluation report, external evaluations and will contribute to proposals for changes to the PQAF processes. By the end of November 2005, Skills for Health will produce a report on the outcomes from the prototype activities, followed by a proposal by the end of December 2005. The Department of Health will respond to the proposals and implementation plan by the end of February 2006.

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

Patricia Le Rolland

General Osteopathic Council reviews

In October 2005, the second edition of the *Handbook for the review of osteopathic courses and course providers* (2005-06) will be published, resulting from the spring/summer evaluation of the 2004-05 experience. Reviews for 2005-06 have begun. The first five reviews are for the renewal of Recognised Qualification (RQ) status. Reports submitted to GOsC by QAA are not published but on the basis of the report, GOsC makes its own recommendation to the Privy Council concerning the renewal of RQ status and of any conditions. In early 2006, there will be at least one review for initial RQ status.

In the latter part of 2005-06, there will be three monitoring reviews covering the remaining three current UK providers. Monitoring reviews focus on outstanding conditions of RQ status, on important changes in provision since the submission to GOsC of the last annual report, and on arrangements for the assessment of clinical practice, including the new arrangements for external examining.

The training of visitors (reviewers), both osteopathic and lay, has continued with events in Cambridgeshire and London (July and

October respectively). We now have a full supply of trained visitors.

In August, we held a second sector briefing for the eight UK college/university providers. The briefing dealt with the 2004-05 review experience, changes to the *Handbook*, preparations for 2005-06 reviews and preparation for institutional contacts. In September a third sector briefing took place. This briefing was designed to promote discussion of clinical practice, external examining, GOsC

review, existing external examination arrangements and QAA's *Code of practice*.

At the end of 2004-05, the former Final Clinical Competence Assessment arrangements lapsed. Responsibility for the appointment of external clinical competence examiners has passed from GOsC to education providers. This change has consequences for the focus of GOsC visitors.

If you have any queries, please contact a.bradshaw@qaa.ac.uk, telephone 01452 557163.

Alan Bradshaw

Special review of research degree programmes

In 2005-06, the special review of research degree programmes will consider the extent to which the policies and procedures of HEIs in England, Wales and Northern Ireland are aligned with QAA's *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

Full details of the review can be found at www.qaa.ac.uk/news/circularLetters/CL0305.asp

Following the consultation on the research degree programmes draft operational description, a revised version has been produced that incorporates additional guidance for HEIs. The revisions include: the requirement for a descriptive commentary (clearly linked to evidence) rather than a full self-evaluation; removing the list of indicative evidence and leaving it to the discretion of institutions to decide how best to demonstrate alignment with the *Code of practice*; limiting the criteria for a 'cause of concern' to any institution that has not considered the intentions of the *Code of practice* and made changes where necessary; and offering institutions the

opportunity to provide supplementary evidence before any visit takes place.

The revised operational description was also informed by a pilot exercise, conducted to test the review methodology and to help inform the guidance provided for HEIs. The revised operational description and questionnaire was sent to HEIs at the end of September. Completed questionnaires should be returned to QAA by 10 February 2006. The documents can be found at www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/postgraduate

On 20 October, we held a briefing in Birmingham on the research degree programmes review for English and Northern Irish institutions. A separate briefing for Welsh institutions will be held on 1 November in Cardiff. A small pool of reviewers has been appointed to undertake the review next year and training will take place in early 2006.

For more information, please contact j.ellis@qaa.ac.uk, telephone 01452 557127.

Julian Ellis

Access to Higher Education

Consultation outcomes

Our consultation, on proposals for a common credit framework for a revised qualification specification for Access to HE, produced messages of strong support from both the

higher and further education sectors. Equally supportive was the response from the authorised validating agencies (AVAs), the awarding bodies for Access to HE, which will be working with partners from both sectors to implement the framework.

We have looked at the responses in detail and made some minor amendments as a result. But the main proposals for the overall shape and key features will become the standard specification for the credit framework and qualification specification for Access to HE, with full implementation from 2008-09.

Of course, many Access to HE programmes are already credit-based. But this development will mean that, for the first time, all Access to HE programmes within the national recognition scheme will operate to common credit principles. There will also be a common specification for the award of the Access to HE qualification. One of the major benefits for receiving institutions will be that Access to HE students' achievement will be recorded in a more transparent and consistent way. Consequently, institutions will be able to develop admissions policies for Access to HE that will apply to students from all recognised Access to HE programmes in England and Wales.

A new credit framework

The new framework for Access to HE will include:

- unit-based programmes, with unit specifications providing standard information in a common format
- the use of rules of combination to ensure the coherence of any programme of study which leads to the award of the Access to HE qualification
- a common definition of credit
- a standard credit value, based on the award of one credit for 10 notional learning hours
- use of common levels and standard level descriptors

- recognition of partial achievement through the award of individual credits
- the issue of credit transcripts to all students
- opportunities for credit accumulation and transfer between programmes and for the accreditation of prior learning, within defined limits.

A revised qualification specification

The revised common specification for the Access to HE qualification will be credit-based and will have a standard credit value of 60 credits. At least 45 of these credits must be at Level 3, with the remainder being at least at Level 2.

There will also be a change in name for the qualification to signify this development, from the current 'Access to Higher Education Certificate' to 'Access to Higher Education Diploma'. This will be consistent with proposals for awards at this level for the Framework for Achievement. All award titles will take the form 'Access to Higher Education Diploma (subject/area of study)', although the subject or area of study may be generic or indicate combined subjects, as is often the case currently.

More information

In the early part of 2006-07, we will disseminate more detailed information about the changes, with a particular focus on the needs of higher education admissions.

In the meantime, if you have any queries please contact k.dentith@qaa.ac.uk, telephone 01452 557109.

Kath Dentith

QAA in Wales

New Officer for Wales

On 1 September 2005, Dr Julian Ellis took over the role of Officer for Wales. The Officer plays a key role in coordinating QAA's approach to its work in Wales. Internally, the purpose of the role is to ensure that through the forum of Team Wales, QAA adopts a cohesive and clearer

focus to its review activities, liaison officer scheme, and development and enhancement work in Wales. Externally, the role includes working with colleagues from HEIs, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, Higher Education Wales and other stakeholders, in the best interests of higher education.



Jane Davidson AM

In June, we held our annual subscribers' meeting in Cardiff. The programme included a presentation from Jane Davidson AM, Minister for Lifelong Learning at the National Assembly for Wales. The Minister's speech covered a number of areas, including the ongoing agenda for change, mergers and collaboration drawing on the recent publication the *Review of 'Post 92' Higher Education in South East Wales*. The Minister also addressed the issue of widening

participation and the idea of Wales as a learning country with access to higher education for all. Another key area was the distinctive approach in Wales to student loans. For more information about the meeting, see page 18.

Reviews

During 2004-05, QAA review activity has included one institutional review at the University of Wales, Newport and a joint taught degree-awarding powers scrutiny and institutional review at North East Wales Institute. The joint process means institutions experience a single set of activities, but receive two distinct outcomes: a confidential final team report on the application to QAA's Advisory Committee on Degree-Awarding Powers; and a separate institutional review report on the institution, published after the degree-awarding powers process has been completed.

In 2005-06, QAA is scheduled to conduct two further joint degree-awarding powers/institutional reviews and an institutional review.

For more information, please contact j.ellis@qaa.ac.uk, telephone 01452 557127.

Julian Ellis

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework: the framework of high expectation

'High achievement always takes place in the framework of high expectation'. So said Charles F Kettering, inventor of the electric automobile starter and the man credited with initiating the phenomenal growth of the motor industry in the early 20th century. It is not known whether he foresaw the rise of road rage, gridlock and the Hillman Imp, but those of us working on the development of Scotland's national framework for education and training - the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) - hope we can agree with his quote, for it is certainly true that much is expected of the SCQF.

Origins

The origins of the SCQF can be traced back to the early meetings of the Scottish Advisory Committee on Credit and Access (SACCA),

a group convened by QAA Scotland and Universities Scotland. SACCA saw the opportunity to build on the success of the Scottish Credit Accumulation and Transfer (SCOTCAT) scheme, which operated in higher education as of session 1991-92. In 1997, the *Garrick report* officially endorsed the creation of a comprehensive framework of qualifications for Scotland, as a key pillar in the realisation of its vision of higher education in the country over the next generation. Subsequently QAA Scotland, with Universities Scotland and the Scottish Qualifications Authority, was invited by the then Scottish Office (now the Scottish Executive) to become a partner in the development of the principles and structures of the SCQF. In 2003, work to implement the Framework across all sectors of education and training began in earnest.

The SCQF is built around two measures to describe qualifications and programmes of learning: the level of the outcomes of learning (how demanding is a qualification?); and the volume of those outcomes, described in terms of SCQF credit points. By employing this simple lexicon, the Framework aims to make the relationships between qualifications clearer and to illuminate routes for progression, credit transfer and learner mobility in general.

Flexible foundations

Crucially, the SCQF is built upon flexible foundations. It has not been conceived as a panacea, nor as a means to regulate or force convergence between sectors, nor indeed as a rigid prescription for providers of education and training. What it does do is describe the variety of pathways and opportunities open to learners of all circumstances and ages. And as the SCQF encompasses schools, colleges, universities and the workplace, it implies real movement, individual choice in engagement and genuine portability of learning.

We are two-thirds of the way into the implementation period for the SCQF: an appropriate time to take stock and reflect upon what has been achieved thus far. As far as the fundamental mechanics go, since 2003-04 the overwhelming majority of qualifications offered by Scottish HEIs have been credit rated and levelled within the SCQF, as have School and Higher National qualifications offered through the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA). Additionally, work has begun to place each individual Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ) within the Framework.

The foundations that will support activity within SCQF have also emerged, after consultation with a range of interested sectors. There are guidelines for those involved in the process of credit rating, guidelines on the quality assurance of the transfer of credit within the Framework and principles governing the Recognition of Prior informal Learning. With the SCQF qualification descriptors (which outline the characteristic outcomes of the main qualifications) and the SCQF-wide common set of headings (which organisations are being encouraged to use to describe their programmes of learning to the public), the guidelines will form the core standards at the heart of the SCQF.

Raising awareness

Much of the activity to implement the SCQF has implied raising awareness about the opportunities it can provide and this will continue, for once the Framework starts to permeate the consciousness of learners, the potential to use the SCQF will really come to fruition. To encourage this, QAA Scotland convenes an SCQF Higher Education Practitioners Group, where representatives from Scottish HEIs come together to explore how the SCQF can be promoted to and used by learners in their institutions. Moreover tangible products of implementation, such as the national electronic mapping database that details progression routes from higher national qualifications into degrees, can provide concrete manifestations of the underlying ethos of the Framework. Issuing HEI transcripts and school certificates containing SCQF information should also spark new perceptions and possibilities.

National reference point

Yet if the SCQF is really to come alive, it must demonstrate that it is more than a circumscribed set of information. It must strive to become the reference point for the educational and training aspirations of the whole country. This is why powers to credit rate within the SCQF are being extended beyond HEIs and SQA. It's why full-time post holders have been appointed to implement the SCQF in the important areas of health, social services and community learning, in addition to sector-based activity continuing in fire and police services, early years and childcare, and financial services. It's why ongoing work to engage with professional and statutory bodies and employers is critical to the success of the Framework. And it's why QAA Scotland remains pivotal in moves to ensure that the managerial structures put in place to energise the SCQF in the future can continue to adapt and evolve to fulfil that need.

Stimulating learners

So what is the future for the SCQF? It will continue to shape itself in response to developments in Scotland - for instance linking with other aspects of QAA Scotland's support for the sector's Quality Enhancement Framework. It will continue to react to and try to influence advances in Europe - as the

Bologna and Copenhagen processes unfold and moves are made towards the establishment of a European Framework of Lifelong Learning. But the true test of its relevance will come as we pass beyond implementation to a phase when both learner and provider use the SCQF imaginatively and creatively. Then it will

become a fluid, responsive and stimulating basis for learning in accordance with the spirit of its conception. Then we will be able to say with confidence that the framework of high expectation has achieved its goal.

Alan Runcie

Benchmarking

The review of subject benchmark statements published in 2000 is under way. QAA has made its own assessment on the revision of individual statements based on the structure, content and vocabulary of standards. We have commissioned the views of subject bodies on the appropriate level of revision (either none, minor or major) to the subject content of statements. These bodies have been asked to consult widely. In November, we will share the results of this exercise. It is likely that only major level revision will require the formation of a full benchmarking group. The revision process should be completed and revised statements published no later than October 2006. *Higher quality 17* (March 2005) included a full list of statements that are under review.

The review of and consultation for the engineering benchmark statement, incorporating the MEng annex, has already begun¹. The closing date for comments is 31 October 2005. The approach proposed by the benchmarking review group for the standards section has been to adopt the *UK Standard for Professional Engineering Competence* (UK-SPEC),

published by the Engineering Council, for the accreditation of higher education programmes. More clarification on the applicability of the standard for IEng programmes has been provided. The drafting and approach to the revised statement builds on feedback from a number of external meetings, held in March and April 2005. The review group would like to hear your views on the draft statement and the approach to the standards section.

Since the last *higher quality* report on benchmarking one more healthcare benchmark statement, *Professions complementary to dentistry*, has been published². This is part of the second phase of the Department of Health project, which is almost complete.

For more information, please contact d.gale@qaa.ac.uk, telephone 01452 557068.

David Gale

¹ www.qaa.ac.uk/news/circularLetters/CL1005.asp

² www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/health

Revisions to the *Code of practice*

Section 6: Assessment of students

Since June, the working group has met three times to consider changes to this section of the *Code of practice*. There are two main principles underlying our discussions. The first is the need to reflect the advice of the Better Regulation Task Force and Higher Education Regulation Review Group. The effect of this is that we are replacing some of the existing bullet points with text that

explains the reasons behind each precept, sometimes giving examples to illustrate the point. The second principle is the importance of assessment in student learning and how it is essential that assessment practice makes a positive contribution to the learning process. We are trying to ensure that this principle is integrated throughout the document.

In October we held two round table events in York and London. The purpose of these meetings was to consult colleagues in institutions and professional, regulatory and statutory bodies (PSRBs) about some of the proposed changes.

The working group will use feedback from the round tables to shape a final draft of *Assessment of students*. This draft will be circulated to heads of institutions for formal consultation. In January 2006, we will hold another round table meeting to provide an opportunity to comment on this final draft. We hope to publish a revised version by March 2006.

Gill Clarke

Section 7: Programme approval, monitoring and review

QAA has convened a working group to revise this section of the *Code of practice*. The group combines expertise from across the UK; HEIs and organisations, including PSRBs, the Higher Education Academy, Universities UK and the Standing Conference of Principals (SCOP).

In July 2005, the group held its first meeting. In line with other revisions to the *Code of practice*, the group agreed to take account of the work of the Better Regulation Task Force and its successor the Higher Education Regulation Review Group. The latest draft

replaces 'guidance' with explanations that show why the precepts are important.

In October we held one round table meeting in London (with another scheduled for 4 November in Birmingham) to discuss the proposed changes. We will do our best to use your comments to improve this section of the *Code of practice* and to produce a document that will be useful in reviewing and developing institutional practices.

We hope to publish the revised section by summer 2006.

Fiona Crozier

Section 10: Recruitment and admissions

The Advisory group, convened to assist QAA with this section of the *Code of practice*, comprises experts and practitioners in recruitment and admissions. It has developed a draft version of the revised text for the proposed revisions. As soon as the proposed amendments have been fully considered and finalised, the revised document will be circulated for formal consultation with HEIs and stakeholders. We hope to publish the revised section in early 2006.

Jayne Mitchell

QAA regional seminars

Autumn 2005 sees QAA embark upon a major series of round table seminars for colleagues from HEIs and PSRBs in the UK. These seminars will provide opportunities to reflect on the work completed to date by QAA on the Academic Infrastructure - benchmark standards, qualifications frameworks, programme specifications and the *Code of practice*. The response to this initiative has been very positive. We have already had to close applications for four of the six regional

meetings, although there are limited spaces for departmental/subject specialists on 14 November in Birmingham and 14 December in London. The outcomes from the autumn meetings will feed into work we will be undertaking in 2006.

Further information can be obtained from m.laugharne@qaa.ac.uk, telephone 01452 557139 or s.melvin@qaa.ac.uk, telephone 01452 557128.

Mike Laugharne

Quality Strategy Network conference

On 4 and 5 July, more than 150 colleagues from higher and further education institutions met at Woburn House, London. They discussed how the links between quality assurance and quality enhancement could be strengthened in the next rounds of audit and review. The Quality Strategy Network (QSN) conference was supported by QAA. Speakers included Professor Dame Sandra Burslem (Vice-Chancellor, Manchester Metropolitan University and Chair of the Quality Assurance Framework Review Group), Peter Williams (Chief Executive, QAA), Norman Sharp (Director, QAA Scotland), Professor Allan Walker (Deputy Director of Academic Development, Glasgow School of Art) and Professor Paul Ramsden (Chief Executive, the Higher Education Academy).

Complementing the plenary sessions were the 'exchange sessions': opportunities for colleagues to exchange information and expertise on a range of quality strategy topics. These included: supporting innovation in approaches to teaching and learning; how QAA audit and review reports might be restructured to support quality enhancement better in institutions; promoting and supporting the role of students in internal and external quality assurance; how to 'do' quality without 'policing' in institutions; and strategies to support academic standards and quality in partnerships.

A theme running throughout the discussions was the need for those framing quality strategies at national level to be aware of how those arrangements constrain the quality strategies developed by institutions. Likewise, several speakers referred to the move since 2001 to have 'lighter touch' external quality review and audit processes. They emphasised the need for those managing academic standards and quality arrangements to ensure that they

required no more work and information from their academic and administrative staff than was strictly necessary to secure the outcomes they were seeking to achieve.

Towards the end of the first day, 80 participants attended a business session chaired for QSN by Dr John Hostler (University of Manchester). At this meeting it was agreed that QSN was serving a valuable purpose, that it should focus on quality strategy, and that it should aim to bring together senior staff across the UK working on academic standards and quality for higher education (including higher education delivered in FECs). Those present recognised the need for QSN to work closely and co-operatively with existing networks and groups, such as the Academic Registrars' Council Quality Practitioners Group and the network for Pro Vice-Chancellors with responsibilities for teaching and learning, set up by the Higher Education Academy. Support for the future of the Network was evident in the number of members volunteering to participate in the work of its Steering Group.

Participants also agreed that a conference should be convened on 23 November, so that institutions could discuss QAA's proposals for the modification of institutional audit, following the publication of the first report of the Quality Assurance Framework Review Group. News of this forthcoming event will be circulated to institutional contacts direct by QSN.

Transcripts and notes for each of the exchange sessions have been circulated to participants via email and are available on request from d.cairns@qaa.ac.uk. Overall, post-conference evaluations showed that more than 90 per cent of respondents thought the conference had been useful and timely.

David Cairns

Quality Takes Time

In September we held the Quality Takes Time conference. This is a twice-yearly event, with the purpose of supporting student union officers who work with quality assurance processes. We run this event jointly with the National Union of Students (NUS) and are supported by our partners the National Postgraduate Committee (NPC), the Association of Managers of Students' Unions, Universities UK and SCOP.



Julian Nicholds, Vice President Education, NUS

The conference included presentations and workshops. The main speakers at the event were Nicola Channon (QAA), Jayne Mitchell (QAA), Phil Cardew (Assistant Vice-Chancellor, University of Winchester), Rachael Tooth (HEFCE) and Helen Bowles (Policy Officer, SCOP). Jim Ewing from the NPC ran a workshop on involving postgraduate students when writing the student written submission. Other workshops looked at collaborative provision audit; the *Code of practice*, with particular reference to assessment of students; the National Student Survey; and student involvement in quality assurance after the audit visit. The presentations will be available from the NUS at www.officeronline.co.uk/quality. This website also includes a link to the Quality Takes Time database, which holds presentations from previous events.

It was a very productive day with lots of debate from the officers who attended. The feedback given shows that the officers found the conference very valuable and a great success. The next event will be held in early 2006.

Janet Bohrer

Peter Williams elected President of ENQA

Peter Williams has been elected president by the 37 members of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). The results of the election were announced on 23 September 2005 at the ENQA General Assembly in Madrid. Peter has been a member of the ENQA Steering Group/Board since it was established in 2000, and Vice-President since 2004.

'ENQA is playing a major role in the creation of an effective European higher education area and I am proud to have been chosen to lead it.

The UK's respect for the autonomy of universities and the interests of students will stand me in good stead as ENQA moves forward in Europe' says Peter Williams.

'So far, the UK's higher education system has only lightly touched by the major changes that are being developed in Europe, but that is about to change. We are well placed to meet the challenges that the Bologna Process is presenting us with, but we need to be more active in helping to shape the future of higher education in Europe.'

Support for quality assurance and enhancement in Ghana

From August 30-31, Ghana's National Council for Tertiary Education (NCTE) and National Accreditation Board (NAB) ran a workshop to brief senior Ghanaian academics about developments in accreditation in the country, and to prepare them to act as champions for quality assurance in their own institutions.

Ms Elizabeth Ohene, the Minister with responsibility for higher education, opened the workshop. The chairs of NCTE, NAB, vice-chancellors and other senior managers attended. The workshop was reported widely in the Ghanaian press and internationally. It was supported by the British Council, which made arrangements for the attendance of QAA's Dr David Cairns who acted as a co-facilitator with the chair of NAB and gave two presentations. These focused on the UK's experience of quality assurance and on linking quality assurance and quality enhancement.



David Cairns (bottom row, right) with Ghanaian colleagues

In Ghana, NAB has begun a series of programme-level accreditation visits to universities and polytechnics, beginning with engineering and the sciences. The purpose of visits is, in part, to provide evidence for the Government and the public of how Ghana's HEIs have managed the rapid expansion of student numbers over the past decade. Private higher education is growing rapidly in Ghana and the World Trade Organisation has been holding discussions on the liberalisation of trade in educational services. Consequently, NAB and NCTE are committed to operating an accreditation regime for higher education that

operates uniformly across the public and the private sectors.

In the immediate term, NAB wishes to encourage the development of 'quality offices' to support quality and academic standards processes in universities, polytechnics and colleges. NAB believes that the establishment of quality offices, and the development of internal review procedures, will enable its accreditation visits to be based largely on the institutions' own internal reports. This should cut down the need for detailed enquiries and reduce the burden of external regulation for the institutions.

Ghanaian colleagues heard with interest about the changes that have taken place in the UK's external quality audit and review arrangements since 1992. They were particularly interested to hear about the different ways in which the relationship between quality assurance and quality enhancement within institutions, and externally, had been taken forward in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland since 2001. There were common features in the greater prominence given to UK institutions' internal quality management arrangements in the post-2001 arrangements: NAB wishes to take these features on board. These and other points (such as the importance of public information in the UK arrangements) provided the basis for a lively exchange between Ghanaian colleagues. This led to a commitment to work together to share good practice in internal quality management across Ghana, aided by NAB and NCTE, and to meet again in 2006 to continue discussions.

In closing the workshop, Mr Paul Effah, the Executive Secretary of NCTE, said that he had been impressed by the close engagement of all the participants in the discussions that had taken place after the presentations and in the breakout sessions. He also used the opportunity to invite the participation of experienced peer reviewers and auditors from other West African nations and from the UK, as members of NAB accreditation panels. This should enable Ghana to continue to be confident that its higher education qualifications are on a par with those of other countries.

David Cairns

Subscribers' meeting feedback

On 14 June, we held our annual subscribers' meeting in Cardiff. Invitations were sent to all HEIs that pay us a subscription and to higher education representative bodies.

This year's programme included presentations on the development of our strategic plan 2006-11, the Quality Assurance Framework in England and Northern Ireland, and the Quality Enhancement Framework in Scotland. As reported on page 11 Jane Davidson AM, Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning at the National Assembly for Wales, gave a well-received presentation on higher education in Wales.

The afternoon sessions concentrated on European and international developments. Peter Williams' presentation on the Bologna Process covered the European Higher Education Area, the main implications of the Bergen communiqué for quality assurance, and European Standards and Guidelines. For more information see www.dfes.gov.uk/bologna

Breakout groups looked at the implications of European and international developments for UK higher education institutions. Some of the main points that arose during the discussions were:

- the impact on student support and student mobility of the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*
- the reluctance of some HEIs to implement a framework for quality for their European/international activities until the position is clearer and there is pump-priming

- differences between international and European higher education, such as exchange arrangements versus credit transfer
- the challenges of managing joint awards with multiple countries, including resources, assessments in languages other than English and translation costs.

There was also a breakout group on credit arrangements in England, led by Nick Harris. During this discussion, delegates stated that:

- the sector should keep to the main principles/operating criteria for national arrangements, although they were split on whether these should be presented as 'guidelines' or a 'framework'
- institutions should be allowed to interpret the principles within their different contexts, but ensure that they are sufficiently detailed to ensure the various Lifelong Learning Networks develop their credit arrangements on similar bases
- they wanted to be clear about the purposes of any new arrangements
- there should be little or no additional bureaucratic burden
- they were split on the relative importance of European (credit) agendas.

We have noted delegates' feedback from the meeting, in particular European and international developments and the subjects that could be discussed at the next subscribers' meeting.

Mia Coke

QAA meets the BS 7799 standard

QAA has been certified for compliance with BS 7799 Part 2, a standard setting out the requirements for an Information Security Management System (ISMS) - the standard describes the processes and structures necessary for establishing and managing information security.

The auditors praised the quality and helpfulness of our staff, and the thorough processes and documentation we have in place.

Adam Lubanski



Peter Williams with Peter Carvin (QMS)

Conferences and events

Contact j.reffin@qaa.ac.uk

9 November 2005	HE in FECs national conference	East Midlands Conference Centre, University Park, Nottingham
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Contact enhancement@qaa.ac.uk

www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk

27 January 2006	Scottish Enhancement Themes national conference	West Park Centre, Dundee
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Round table meetings

Contact p.lerolland@qaa.ac.uk

2 November 2005	Debate and exploration of quality assurance for PSRBs involved in healthcare	Woburn House, London
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Contact s.melvin@qaa.ac.uk

4 November 2005	<i>Code of practice, Section 7: Programme approval, monitoring and review</i>	Holiday Inn Regents Park, London
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QAA regional seminars

Contact s.melvin@qaa.ac.uk

14 November 2005	For departmental/subject specialists	Aston Business School, Birmingham
14 December 2005	For PSRBs	Holiday Inn Regents Park, London

QAA publications

Date	Publication
August 2005	<p><i>Strategic plan 2006-11</i> draft for consultation - deadline for responses 1 November 2005</p> <p><i>Learning from continuation audit</i> (web only)</p> <p>Enhancement Themes (Employability):</p> <p><i>The Skills for Business Network: A briefing paper for Scottish higher education institutions</i></p>
September 2005	<p>Liaison scheme annual report (web only)</p> <p>Evaluation of the Prototypes for ongoing quality, monitoring and enhancement, and approval (Major review)</p>

October 2005	<p><i>Handbook for the review of osteopathic courses and course providers 2005-06</i></p> <p><i>Quality Assurance News for healthcare education - No 8</i></p> <p>Enhancement Themes (Employability):</p> <p><i>Engaging with employers on international best practice guide</i></p> <p><i>Enhancing student employability: innovative projects from across the curriculum</i></p> <p><i>Working together: enhancing students' employability</i></p>
November 2005	<p><i>Learning from higher education in further education colleges</i></p> <p>Outcomes from institutional audit papers (web only):</p> <p><i>Staff support and development</i></p> <p><i>Learning support arrangements (including VLEs)</i></p> <p><i>Academic guidance, support and supervision arrangements for students</i></p> <p><i>Validation and approval, and periodic review</i></p> <p>Enhancement Themes (Employability):</p> <p><i>Overall strategic outcomes</i></p> <p>Report of Foundation Degrees converted from HNDs</p>
December 2005	<p>Programme specifications interim report</p> <p>Draft QAA Scotland strategic overview</p> <p>Foundation Degree overview report</p> <p><i>Annual Review Trends Report 2004-05 (Major review)</i></p>

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