

A clear strategic path



It seems only a few months since we published QAA's *Strategic plan 2003-05*, but this month sees the appearance of our new plan, to cover 2006-11. Part of the work we have been doing in recent months to create this new plan has been to see how far we achieved the objectives we set ourselves three years ago. As plan periods go, three years is not long; but in 2002 we felt it unwise to predict in too much detail the world we would inhabit in 2005. As it turned out, our crystal ball gazing was remarkably prescient and we achieved almost all of our intentions. Any readers who wish to see exactly what we envisaged back then can do so by looking at our website.¹

The new *Strategic plan 2006-11* contains a section which assesses our achievements in the past three years, but the main thrust of the document is, of course, the future. Here the landscape is, as always, brumous, but our path is clear. We remain committed to our established purposes, standards and values. We also intend to make sure that our work is always informed by both the public interest in the standards and quality of the UK's higher education and the needs of our higher education community. That interest and those needs are not, I believe, at odds. Increasingly, the effect of tuition fees will be to bring them closer: the provision of sound standards and high quality is both what students will demand and institutions will want to provide, if only to ensure they remain sought after and thereby competitive. In such a world good information becomes a key requirement; work remains to be done to secure reliable and useful profiles of what students will actually be offered if they choose a particular study programme or institution.

So, some of our work will continue to focus on information, but information acquired at minimum cost to universities and colleges. We are strongly committed to the various better-regulation-reduction-of-burden

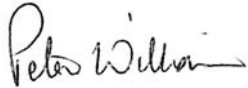
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projects. It is now very gratifying to be able to develop a six-year institutional audit cycle as the main external quality assurance process for England. In the space of five years we shall have moved from a heavy regime of six or seven reviews each year for many institutions, to a much lighter scheme which requires only one whole-institution audit every six years. This risk-based approach is only possible because higher education institutions (HEIs) now have strong and mature internal quality assurance arrangements in which the public, through QAA, can have confidence.

The devolved UK, the gathering momentum of international interest in quality and its assurance, the further search for synergy with others who need to know what's going on in our universities and colleges - we shall be tackling all these complex and demanding topics in the next five years.

What else is there on the horizon? Read the *Strategic plan* and find out.



Peter Williams
Chief Executive

¹ www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/strategicplan/2003/delivery

Operational description for institutional audit: analysis of consultation responses

Between November 2005 and January 2006, QAA undertook a consultation exercise on the operational description for the revised institutional audit process, which will be conducted in HEIs in England and Northern Ireland. The proposed revisions to the institutional audit process build upon the recommendations of the Quality Assurance Framework Review Group and the findings of QAA's evaluation processes.

We received 72 responses to the consultation, primarily from HEIs. Almost all were broadly supportive of the proposals for the revised method of audit, and welcomed the opportunity to comment. Those aspects most welcomed by respondents were:

- the revised audit trail proposals within audit
- the changes to the existing judgements
- the move towards an enhancement focus
- the continued participation of students in the process.

Most respondents considered that the aims and objectives, as set out in the operational description, were clear, concise and appeared to align with the initiatives and demands springing out of the globalisation of higher education activity.

Respondents also welcomed the proposals both to develop interaction between the audit

team and the institution, and to develop greater clarity of guidance to institutions preparing for audit.

Respondents generally considered that the revised method embodied the recommendations of the Quality Assurance Framework Review Group.

Other comments from respondents were primarily focused upon the need for greater clarity and transparency with respect to the proposals. Further information was requested regarding:

- the proposed 'basic set' and 'supplementary' audit trails
- the purpose, content and structure of the institutional briefing paper
- the recruitment and selection to audit teams
- the use of reference points, to include the European Standards and Guidelines
- the proposals regarding mid cycle reviews
- the approach to enhancement.

Many respondents noted that although the operation description implied the notion of a lighter touch and a reduced burden upon institutions, it was not apparent how this would be achieved. A minority of respondents expressed concerns that the revised method may in fact increase the burden placed upon

institutions, as a result of the current 'unknowns'. We are grateful to everyone who responded to the consultation document. We recognise that further information is required on many aspects of the proposals, and have taken the comments into account when developing the draft handbook. In addition to the

consultation on the draft handbook (responses by 25 April), a consultation document has been sent out to ask for responses on our proposals for interim mid-cycle reviews.

Nicola Channon

Outcomes from institutional audit: new papers

Since *higher quality 19* (October 2005), we have published six new *Outcomes from institutional audit* papers: *Staff support and development arrangements; Student representation and feedback arrangements; Programme monitoring arrangements; Assessment of students; Validation and approval of new provision, and its periodic review; Learning support arrangements, including virtual learning environments.*

The findings in these papers are drawn from the first 70 institutional audit reports, which were published by November 2004.

The papers are available at www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionalaudit/outcomes

We have received helpful feedback on the format and the content of the earlier papers.

Colleagues suggested that it would be easier to follow up features of good practice cited in the papers if more complete references were provided to the original audit reports. We have, therefore, tried to provide fuller paragraph references in the papers.

In spring 2006 papers will be published on work-based learning; academic advice and guidance; progression and completion statistics; institutions' frameworks for quality and standards; collaborative provision; and international students and their support.

David Cairns

Higher education in further education colleges

We have recently completed an overview of academic reviews of HE subjects in further education colleges (FECs) in England carried out between September 2003 and July 2005. The report covers the 105 reviews of directly and consortium-funded HE delivered in 76 FECs. It demonstrates the many and varied strengths of HE in FECs and there is much to celebrate.

The 2003-05 reviews provide evidence of much good practice and significant development of the provision of HE by FECs. Of particular note are an increased level of effective engagement with QAA's Academic Infrastructure and the success in widening participation in HE.

During 2005-06, there will be 35 academic reviews at the programme level. This is the final year for the review of the current group of subjects. Following the letter sent to colleges by Sir Howard Newby on 30 September 2005 about reviews in 2006-07, we are identifying the colleges with directly-funded programmes which have never had a QAA review.

We intend to publish a series of statistical leaflets to share information about HE in FECs. The first of these will appear in autumn 2006. In order to assist with subsequent editions, as well as with the planning of the Integrated quality enhancement reviews (IQER), we shall write to all colleges asking for information about the programmes you teach.

We also plan to publish the new method for the review of HE in FECs, IQER, for consultation at the end of April. We are currently developing the training materials, so that in the autumn we can train the teams who will take part in the pilot reviews in 2006-07. We hope that many of you will contribute to the development of the method by responding to the consultation. If you have any queries, please contact p.mccracken@qaa.ac.uk, telephone 01452 557172.

Penny McCracken
Derek Greenaway

Foundation Degree reviews

We are now almost at the end of the Foundation Degree activity commissioned by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) in 2004. We would like to thank those who took part in the reviews. We have now published all three of the major reports on Foundation Degrees. These are available on the website and in hard copy from our distributors, Linney Direct. We shall be working with Foundation Degree Forward (FDF) to disseminate the findings.

In May 2005, we published the Report of the survey to follow up the Foundation Degree programmes reviewed in 2002-03. The second survey of Foundation Degrees, which had been converted from HNDs, appeared in October. The survey found that the students on these Foundation Degrees were similar to those who had previously enrolled on the HNDs: predominantly male, under 25 years, with traditional qualifications and attending full-time.

The third report, published in December 2005, is *Learning from the reviews of Foundation Degrees in England in 2004-05*. There are many positive points in the programmes reviewed. HEIs and FECs are learning from year to year what works well for them. Some employment sectors, such as engineering, find employers more ready to be actively involved in the programme after the development phase. HEIs are also finding ways of working successfully with small and medium sized businesses. In education studies, where students are employed full-time, work-based learning and the use of mentors work well overall. The report also draws attention to areas for development and also to matters for consideration by employers, Sector Skills Councils, policy makers, FDF and the Higher Education Academy.

Penny McCracken

Major review and the proposed Partnership Quality Assurance Framework

End of the review cycle

Major review provides a comprehensive baseline for quality assurance of NHS-funded healthcare education in England. The period 2005-06 is the final year of this review cycle and the final reviewer training event took place in November 2005. By summer 2006, 23 major reviews are scheduled for completion. Two more reviews will take place in autumn 2006 to complete the cycle.

Review trends

The second *Annual Review Trends Report* has been published on our website.¹ It identifies trends from the reviews conducted up to spring 2005. Some positive features of the method are the success of the briefing and training workshops in preparation for review; the usefulness of the preparatory meeting; the 2+2+1 day model allowing for reflection and further preparation between visits; and the effectiveness of the major review facilitator and practice review facilitator role in review

process. The main challenges include the common intensity of the review across all sizes of provision, recruiting specialist reviewers in some disciplines, and lack of direct service-user and carer involvement in the process.

Positive trends in the outcomes of reviews include the partnerships between the provider organisations; the use of the clinical placement facilitator to support assessment in practice; an overall picture of high academic and practitioner standards; and good quality in learning opportunities. Some common weaknesses identified include a lack of consistency in the use of marking criteria for assessments and of the processes for returning feedback on assessments to students. This report also includes a statistical analysis of student data on achievement, progression and employment. A fact sheet based on this report will be available later this year. A final cumulative review trends report will be published by December 2006, which will report on outcomes, learning points and a statistical analysis of the data from the whole cycle.

Events

The health team are arranging three student/service user group events throughout the spring, and a major review stakeholder event in March 2006 to seek feedback from and update delegates on developments in the quality assurance of healthcare education and the proposed Partnership Quality Assurance Framework (PQAF). On 27 June 2006, we will be holding the third national conference in Birmingham. This will address future arrangements for quality assurance of healthcare learning in England and perspectives on international best practice. To register interest in the national conference, please email HealthCon06@qaa.ac.uk

Next steps for the PQAF

The next steps for the PQAF include a period of discussion, debate and reflection on the way

forward with an extended group of partners. Skills for Health intend to produce a set of interim standards for use in quality assurance of healthcare education during the formation of the new partnership and the implementation of a new framework following the end of the major review cycle. These standards will be reduced in number and revised following recommendations made by QAA and an external evaluation of the Approval and ongoing quality management and enhancement processes. QAA's report is available on our website.²

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

Patricia Le Rolland

¹ www.qaa.ac.uk/health/majorreview/reviewtrends05/contents.asp

² www.qaa.ac.uk/health/framework

Healthcare Commission Concordat

QAA has signed up to the Healthcare Commission Concordat as an associate signatory member. The Concordat sets out what organisations providing healthcare in England can expect from inspecting bodies. The 10 objectives aim to reduce unnecessary burdens on staff, improve services for patients, and deliver more consistent and coherent programmes of inspection. Signatories work with each other and the Healthcare Commission to coordinate scheduling of visits, sharing evidence wherever appropriate and undertake joint working. As an associate signatory we do not directly undertake review of health or healthcare, but we are closely associated with the principles and objectives set out in the Concordat.

The Concordat is consistent with the Government's policy on the inspection of public services. QAA undertakes a range of work in health-related areas, particularly in relation to higher education programmes. This work, and our commitment to minimising unnecessary work and duplication of effort, reflects that of the Higher Education Regulation Review Group and the higher education sector. We are very pleased to be working with the Healthcare Commission and our colleagues in health and social care. More information about the Commission can be found at www.healthcarecommission.org.uk

Patricia Le Rolland

General Osteopathic Council reviews

The second edition of the *Handbook for the General Osteopathic Council review of osteopathic courses and course providers* (2005-06) was published in autumn 2005. It is available in hard copy and on our website. Publication coincided with the third and final round of visitor (reviewer) training under the present contract. We also took the opportunity

to train more review coordinators in General Osteopathic Council (GOsC) review and more of the GOsC's own officers who may support reviews in future.

The revised *Handbook* has guided the 2005-06 reviews. By the end of 2005, three renewal of Recognised Qualification (RQ) status reviews

were completed and the reports will be presented to the GOsC Education Committee in March 2006. One renewal of recognition review was extended into January and another was combined with an initial recognition review in an osteopathic education provider that hopes to expand its portfolio of courses. QAA officers supported the reviews closely. They attended all the final meetings of review visitors, sometimes attending all days of the on-site visit. Two more initial recognition reviews are likely during the 2006 calendar year.

The recent application to GOsC of various colleges and universities for initial recognition of new courses means that the original agreement between QAA and GOsC has been expanded to accommodate the extra reviews needed.

In the second half of 2005-06, the three monitoring reviews covering the remaining three current UK providers will be under way. 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.

Monitoring review is not a full renewal of RQ status review. Although the three monitoring reviews each include a visit to the college, GOsC, through QAA, has tried to minimise the burden of scrutiny. Review visitors are briefed to respect closely the terms of reference.

Reports submitted to GOsC by QAA are not published. 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.

QAA officers have continued to work with GOsC on subject benchmarking and to draft a revised review appeals procedure for GOsC. QAA has worked to expand and improve some of the instruments that we use to administer reviews. GOsC and QAA officers have met to prepare for the 2006-07 review programme.

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

Alan Bradshaw

Special review of research degree programmes

In October 2005, we sent questionnaires to all institutions participating in the special review of research degree programmes. The closing date for the return of institutional submission was 10 February 2006.

In January 2006, we held a training event in Gloucester for all of the reviewers. The main purpose of the event was to introduce reviewers to the special review methodology and respond to any concerns they had. The training was also designed to ensure consistency, both in terms of the approach by individual reviewers and in terms of the overall outcomes of the review.

The institutional submissions have been distributed to the reviewers. In March, the reviewers will undertake their analysis of the institutional responses and produce their draft reports for each institution. Review coordinators and QAA Assistant Directors will meet to ensure consistency between reports.

The reports will then be edited and a final draft produced. Once the final draft has been completed, at the beginning of May, the reports will be sent to institutions for comment.

The report format will follow the structure of the questionnaire, where precepts have been grouped into themes. The reviewers will be expected to comment on the extent to which institutions have aligned their quality processes and procedures with the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (the Code of practice): Section 1, Postgraduate research programmes*. When drawing their conclusions the reviewers, where appropriate, may identify areas of good practice within the institution and also areas where institutions may want to consider further action before any forthcoming institutional audit.

If you have any queries, please contact j.ellis@qaa.ac.uk, telephone 01452 557127.

Julian Ellis

Access to Higher Education

Access to HE credit framework and Diploma developments

We have continued to develop the specifications for the common credit framework for Access to HE and the new Access to HE Diploma, as reported in *higher quality* 19, and the early stages of implementation have begun. The overarching staged implementation timescale will ensure that all QAA-recognised Access to HE programmes meet the new requirements by July 2008. All successful Access to HE students will be awarded the new Access to HE Diploma from July 2009.

The first stage of this process has been completed and in January 2006 all authorised validating agencies (AVAs) submitted their individual implementation plans to QAA.

The plans describe how AVAs will meet the credit framework and qualification specification requirements within this timescale. AVAs are at different starting points in this process, and the point within this timescale at which they will complete the different stages will vary. As a result, there will be a phased introduction of the new Diploma between 2007 and 2009, as the old Access to HE Certificate is phased out.

The date at which the Access to HE Diploma can be awarded by any AVA will depend on QAA's approval of the AVA's individual plan, and the AVA's fitness to award credit and the Diploma, as confirmed through a programme of reviews of all AVAs. These reviews will take place over the next two years.

Activity/date	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
1 Submission of individual AVA implementation plans to QAA	Jan 2006			
2 Schedule for revalidation of programmes agreed	July 2006			
3 AVA procedures relating to award credits and Access to HE Diploma approved		July 2007		
4 AVA delivers programme of information dissemination for local staff about changes		July 2007		
5 Programme revalidations completed: all Access to HE programmes meet new credit and qualification requirements			July 2008	
6 All Access to HE students on programmes leading to a new qualification specification			Sept 2008	
7 All Access to HE Diplomas and credits awarded according to revised specifications				July 2009

Differentiation on the Access to HE qualification

The next stage of development work for Access to HE relates to the recommendation in the 2004 Access Development Project Report. The Report proposed that, 'A national system of grading for the Access award should be developed...through which different levels of individual final achievement can be readily and reliably identified'. An expert group is developing a number of possible models and we will be

holding round table discussions to develop these ideas further in late spring. If you would like to participate in these discussions, please contact Ann-Marie Karadia (a.karadia@qaa.ac.uk or telephone 01452 557118).

AVA mergers

Many of the organisations holding AVA licences are Open College Networks (OCNs) and most of these are currently undergoing mergers. This process will result in larger

organisations with greater development capacity and a more regional focus. Within the next 12 months we shall be considering applications for AVA licences from each of these merged organisations. The success of the

AVA licence application will be indicated by the organisation's adoption of the regional OCN's name for its Access to HE work.

Kath Dentith

Our work in Wales

Compared with recent years, we are planning or operating a relatively large number of review activities in Wales. These activities include scrutiny for degree-awarding powers and university title, institutional review, the audit of overseas provision in China and the special review of research degree programmes.

As a consequence, many Welsh HEIs will be engaged in a closer relationship with QAA than they might have experienced for a while. We would hope that this will not only offer HEIs the opportunity to reflect on their management of quality and standards, but also on any changes to the management of quality and standards which will lead to enhancements that benefit both the providers and recipients of higher education in Wales. It will also provide an opportunity for us to increase our understanding of the environment in which HEIs in Wales are operating.

We will be using a broad range of reviewers to undertake our activities in Wales. Most teams will have at least one member with substantial experience of the higher education sector in Wales and at least one member will be from an HEI in England, Scotland or Northern Ireland. Wherever possible, and where requested, we would hope to be able to include one Welsh speaker on each team.

We are also collaborating with NUS Wales and we propose to hold regular training events for student representatives. The training will be aimed at those institutions where QAA review activity has either just started or is due to start shortly. The purpose of the training sessions is to give student representatives support and guidance on the preparation and writing of a student written submission, and preparing students for what to expect when they meet with the reviewers.

As the Officer for Wales I am in the process of visiting all HEIs in Wales. On these visits I will be explaining QAA's approach to its work in Wales and in turn listening to any issues or concerns raised. So far, the main issues include the changing role of the University of Wales and the move towards institutions securing degree-awarding powers; the reconfiguration and collaboration agenda; Welsh higher education in a UK context; the Welsh language medium and bilingualism; and the role of QAA's Advisory Group for Wales.

If you have any queries, please contact j.ellis@qaa.ac.uk, telephone 01452 557127.

Julian Ellis

Scotland's Enhancement Themes conference: the reflective sector supporting reflective practice

On 27 January 2006, the third annual Enhancement Themes conference was held at the West Park Centre, University of Dundee. The conference coincided with an exciting stage in the ongoing development of the sector-wide work on the Themes.

The 270 participants heard about the work of the recently established Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC). Professor Kenneth Miller (Chair of SHEEC and

Vice Principal at the University of Strathclyde) described the work of the Committee - not only in overseeing the five-year rolling plan of themes but, importantly, in taking forward a programme of work to support HEIs in the strategic management and embedding of quality enhancement.

In its three meetings to date, the Committee has placed a particular focus on the management of quality and begun the process

of identifying the ways in which its programme of work can best support the management of quality in the reflective institution.

In other plenaries, Professor Joan Stringer (Principal of Napier University and Chair of University Scotland's Learning and Teaching Committee) set the Themes in the wider context of Quality Enhancement Framework, which is attracting increasing international interest in this growing area. Professor Stringer highlighted the central importance of the underlying principles student engagement in quality and of partnership including through the Quality Working Group.

Conference plenaries also provided participants with a first opportunity to hear about the outcomes emerging from the two recent Themes on Flexible Delivery (presented by Professor Terry Mayes, Chair of the Steering Committee) and Employability (presented by Professor Graeme Roberts, Chair of the Steering Committee).

Drawing on the considerable innovative practice and useful material within the higher education sector, these Themes have raised awareness of the issues throughout the sector, provided a catalyst for collaborative support of HEIs (a successful model for future themes) and also contributed to other work, including the Scottish Funding Council's implementation plan on employability. Publications on the outcomes from these two Themes will also be issued in the spring.

The core of the conference was two rounds of 12 workshops. This provided opportunities for

participants to share approaches to Themes already reported on; contribute to shaping the final outcomes of Themes close to completion; and to discuss new and future Themes.

Discussions that took place at these workshops are feeding directly into the ongoing development of the themes and had particular value in informing thinking about the emerging themes of The First Year and the potential future theme on the ways in which Research-Teaching linkages can best enhance the higher education learning experience.

Following the afternoon's workshops, Professor Mike Pittilo (recently appointed Principal at The Robert Gordon University) compared and contrasted his experience of enhancement north and south of the border. The final words were from James Alexander, Deputy President, NUS Scotland who stressed the importance not only of the learner-focused nature of quality enhancement, but also of student input and involvement in the Themes. He concluded by suggesting that a student may well chair one of the Enhancement Themes.

Initial feedback indicates that the conference was successful in achieving its key aim of supporting the continuing and collective work of enhancing the teaching and learning experience for students. We have also sent conference packs to around 100 people who we were unable to accommodate at the conference. Copies of presentations and papers will be available at www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk

Christine Macpherson

Programme specifications

Following the first annual liaison conference, held in April 2005 in London, the programme specifications project has culminated in a consultation with the sector, issued on 22 December 2005 (the closing date for responses was 28 February 2006). Feedback from the conference and other meetings indicated that the sector would value guidance on minimum content, because of the expectation that institutions will make programme specifications public.

The proposals outlined in the consultation represents a dynamic approach to the

presentation of programme specifications to students and other stakeholders. QAA, in conjunction with representatives from the sector, has developed this guidance on minimum content and the consultation proposes a web-based programme specification index called Programme Plus.

The proposals for the development of Programme Plus, with its links to an institution's programme specifications or other relevant documents, align with the original *Dearing report* concept of supporting current and prospective students by providing them with

the opportunity to make informed choices about programmes/institutions, based on clear and readily comparable information.

We aim to publish an updated edition of the *Guidelines for preparing programme specifications*

by May 2006, following the consultation with the sector on the proposals for Programme Plus.

Katie Akerman
Fiona Crozier

Credit arrangements for England

Universities UK will report on the outcomes of their (Burgess Group) consultation on 'Proposals for national arrangements for the use of academic credit in higher education in England' (September to December 2005) in due course.

The results were very positive responses to both a set of proposals, based on widespread current practice in higher education, and related questions about how such practice might be brought together to provide guidelines at a national level. There was strong support for linking guidance on credit with *The Framework for higher education qualifications*, developments that will involve QAA. Numerous comments indicated the importance of ensuring that national arrangements must not be overly prescriptive or encroach upon current or potential practices within autonomous HEIs. Other comments noted that guidance on credit should be no more than a series of 'reference points' for institutions. It was also noted that arrangements should reflect higher education credit practice in Scotland and in Wales, where there are credit and qualifications frameworks, and with the European Credit and Transfer System (ECTS). Some responses also noted the emerging proposals for the use of credit in further and vocational education in England.

The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) is developing proposals for a Framework for Achievement (FfA). It is anticipated that from 2010, this will replace the National Qualifications Framework (for QCA regulated vocational and other qualifications). The FfA will be based on units (modules) and credit.

Ministers are keen that the credit developments being undertaken within the vocational/further education and the higher education sector are compatible and, in particular, can support and encourage student progression within lifelong learning. Ministers have asked the Joint Forum for Higher Levels (a body that includes QAA and is chaired by HEFCE Board member, Mr Dick Coldwell) to see how this can be encouraged and achieved.

It is emphasised, however, that neither the credit work of the Joint Forum or QCA will cut across or supplant that of the Burgess Group

The Burgess Group will be holding major conferences on their work, including credit developments, on 23 March in Manchester and on 5 April in London. More details are available from Nicola.Berkley@UniversitiesUK.ac.uk

Nick Harris

The Code of practice: review and revisions

As part of the ongoing programme of review and revision of the *Code of practice*, three sections have been redrafted and are available for consultation: *Assessment of students*; *Programme design, approval, monitoring and review* and *Admissions to higher education*.

The process of reviewing and revising each section of the *Code of practice* has involved convening an advisory group (comprising practitioners, stakeholders and experts) for each of the three sections, and taking feedback

and comment from participants at a series of round table discussion events.

Each advisory group has also taken note of recommendation 4 (part 4) of the Interim report of the Better Regulation Review Group (BRRG) to the Minister for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education (November 2003) that, 'The QAA should simplify, and compress its *Code of practice* to make it user friendly and less prescriptive in tone. The QAA should make clear that its precepts are pointers

to good practice rather than standards with which HEIs have to comply'.

In line with the proposal QAA put to the BRRG to undertake, 'a review of the *Code of practice* which will include the removal of misleading words such as "should"...and a redrafted foreword that will be clear about the status of the *Code of practice* - as non-prescriptive but good practice - for universities', each section has been redrafted to provide a series of precepts and accompanying explanations. The precepts express key matters of principle that the higher education community has identified as important for the assurance of quality and academic standards, while the accompanying explanations show why the precepts are important.

Section 6: Assessment of students

Following the two round table events in October 2005, there has been more discussion on the draft of this section and amended by the advisory group.

The feedback received from participants in both round table meetings showed thoughtful and positive consideration of the draft. The advisory group has tried to take account of all the points made at the round table meetings, which are summarised on our website at www.qaa.ac.uk/education/roundtable

For further information about *Section 6* please contact g.clarke@qaa.ac.uk

Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review

Two very useful round table meetings were held in autumn 2005. These confirmed the view of the advisory group that *Section 7* did not need a root and branch revision, but rather updating to reflect the change in context since it was first published in 2000.

The advisory group also considered it appropriate to add the word 'design' to the title of the section to reflect the importance of that activity in the text. An additional precept

has been added to cover the important area of the withdrawal of programmes.

For further information about *Section 7* please contact f.crozier@qaa.ac.uk

Section 10: Admissions to higher education

The advisory group has considered a number of suggested amendments to *Section 10*, including the addition of precepts covering the provision of information to unsuccessful applicants, clarification of the distinction between complaints about the operation of admissions policies and practices, and appeals against the outcomes of a selection decision.

The group also developed the introduction to acknowledge the complex, ongoing and inter-related processes of recruitment, admission, induction and orientation of students to higher education. As a consequence, and in order to encompass all of the related activities in this area, the title of this section has been simplified to *Admissions to higher education*.

For further information about *Section 10*, please contact j.bohrer@qaa.ac.uk

The draft revised sections of the *Code of practice* are available on our website. Heads of institutions, individuals, professional, statutory and regulatory bodies and other stakeholders have received a copy of each of the revised sections. This includes a formal, written invitation to comment on each of the new drafts before 24 March 2006. We look forward to receiving your comments and, as on previous occasions, will do our best to accommodate the diverse needs of different groups.

Janet Bohrer
Gill Clarke
Fiona Crozier
Jayne Mitchell

QAA regional seminars update

In autumn 2005, QAA organised a series of successful seminars in York, Manchester, Birmingham and London. Around 350 delegates from across the UK attended, representing subject staff, quality officers and senior managers from HEIs, and senior officers from the professional and regulatory bodies.

Participants reflected on the work completed to date by QAA on the Academic Infrastructure - subject benchmark statements, qualification descriptors, programme specifications and the *Code of practice*. The seminars provided a very welcome and timely opportunity to gather a spectrum of perceptions and perspectives on

QAA's work on developing the Academic Infrastructure during the last five to six years.

We are grateful for the contributions from delegates and encouraged by what we have heard. In February we published a report on the seminars, which was sent to delegates. Following further discussion within QAA, we will consider how the work may be taken forward with the HE sector. We hope to build on what we have heard from colleagues attending these seminars and to continue developing the Academic Infrastructure.

Mike Laugharne

International developments

Looking East

QAA has been successful in achieving observer status of the Asia Pacific Quality Network (APQN).¹ As I am QAA's contact person for APQN, I will participate in its annual general meeting and workshop in Shanghai in early March. The APQN, whose Secretariat is based at the Australian Universities Quality Agency in Melbourne, is a recipient of a World Bank grant to support its start-up activities and is a network with a major interest in the quality assurance of transnational or cross-border education. Many member agencies are responsible for the accreditation or licensing of foreign provision delivered in their countries and others have responsibility for the audit or accreditation of their members' or subscribers' cross-border activities.

APQN, along with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the Hong Kong America Center and the Center for Quality Assurance in International Education (CQAIE) sponsored the Hong Kong Education Forum from 18-19 December 2005. The discussions at this event, in which QAA was invited to participate, focused on the opportunities and challenges in transnational higher education. The only other European agency present at the Forum was the Spanish National Accreditation Agency

(ANECA). Parallel to QAA and APQN membership, ANECA has been invited to participate in RIACES, the Latin American regional network, because of the volume of transnational education delivered from Spain to South America.

The merger of the Malaysian qualifications agency (LAN) and the Quality Assurance Division of the Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia, was announced last year. Dr Sharifah Hapsah Shahabudin, Director of the Quality Assurance Division, has recently been appointed Chairman Designate of LAN. QAA has a Memorandum of Understanding with LAN and will shortly be having discussions (by video conference in the first instance) with colleagues at LAN about the impending changes in its management and activities, as well as proposals for its involvement in the implementation of the Malaysian Qualifications Framework.

Closer to home

In December 2005 QAA hosted a workshop for the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). Apart from QAA staff, there were 25 participants from 22 agencies and 14 countries around Europe discussing 'The improvement and development of evaluation methodologies'. QAA officers were contributors at the event, which included a

presentation by Nicola Channon on the revised process for institutional audit in England. This was the first of two events that QAA is coordinating for ENQA. The second, to be held in June 2006, will focus on the language of quality assurance and the challenges of translation and interpretation. Meanwhile, QAA continues to participate in the various

stakeholder groups across the UK involved in the dissemination of information about and implementation of the Bologna Process.

Carolyn Campbell

¹ www.apqn.org/membership/observers/criteria/

European project work

Trans-national European evaluation project II (TEEP II)

TEEP II is jointly managed by six European quality agencies or accreditation committees. It builds on the experience of TEEP I (www.enqa.net/projectarchive) by applying an internationally recognised evaluation method to three Erasmus Mundus joint master's programmes, which were selected from a number of volunteers. Two of the three programmes selected involve participation by a UK institution.

As well as providing an opportunity for the three programmes to share experiences and to obtain feedback, the project aims to:

- develop criteria that are commonly agreed, that have been tested and that offer a dimension of transparency
- contribute to the development of the quality assurance of joint degree programmes on the basis of the recommendations from the expert panel members, and identification of good practice for comparable programmes and networks.

QAA is working with the Hungarian Accreditation Agency to facilitate the evaluation of the CoMundus master's degree in Media and Mass Communications. There are seven European members of the consortium from France, Denmark, UK, Italy and Germany. All the site visits have now been carried out. In February 2006, the programme report was finalised and a methodological report on the project as a whole will follow in May 2006.

Joint UK/Danish evaluation of chemistry

The Danish Agency (EVA) is carrying out a nationwide subject evaluation of chemistry

provision in Danish HEIs. EVA invited QAA to participate in the project, with a view to sharing good practice at subject level and with regard to quality assurance procedures in the light of *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*, published by ENQA. The report is available at www.enqa.net

Four UK universities volunteered to take part in the project. The Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC) has also been involved in initial discussions and in helping to find an appropriate panel chair and subject expert. An RSC member has also been invited to observe the on-site visits.

Following a meeting in Copenhagen in November, at which the UK and Danish institutions were able to meet and discuss the methodology to be used, a self-evaluation manual is being finalised. This will set out the expectations of the project and the criteria with which the institutions will work to develop their self-evaluation documents. All of the UK participants intend to use documentation recently provided, either for internal review purposes or as material for a discipline audit trail within the audit process for England and Northern Ireland.

The objectives of the review include describing and evaluating the following features.

The educational context for the programmes, to provide:

- a factual basis to support an understanding of the programmes provided, and their self-evaluation by the departments involved.

The student learning experience, to provide:

- an assessment of the programmes in terms of content, intended learning outcomes, learning and teaching methods to support the achievement of the outcomes, and

- assessment methods used to demonstrate student achievement
 - an assessment of the level of implementation of the first and second cycle degree structure, and whether the programmes have formulated goals for the bachelor's degree and master's degree that match national and/or other descriptors, including the 'Dublin descriptors'
 - an assessment of the critical differences between the first and second cycles, and particularly identification of those elements and expectations that distinguish the bachelor's degree (and its graduates) from the master's degree.
- Quality assurance to:
- develop a better understanding of the quality assurance mechanisms used within chemistry programmes in the UK and Denmark, including the role(s) of external examiners
 - examine quality assurance mechanisms applied to and within the programmes
 - have the programmes reflect on the effectiveness of their existing quality assurance mechanisms and consider what influence the recently published European Standards and Guidelines might have on their processes and activities.
- These objectives highlight the European dimension to the project.
- In March 2006, EVA and QAA will receive the self-evaluation material. Site visits are planned for March, April and May 2006, and there will be an overarching report on completion of the project.
- For more information, please contact f.crozier@qaa.ac.uk, telephone 01452 557129.
- Fiona Crozier**

Changes to the QAA Board of Directors

QAA is a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity. Its 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 members - Professor Tony Chapman, Mr Mike Killingley and Mrs Elizabeth Reid - retired from the Board in December 2005 in accordance with QAA's Articles of Association. Two new Board

members have been appointed - Professor Noel Lloyd, Vice-Chancellor, University of Wales Aberystwyth and Mr Andrew Summers, Chairman, Brandsmiths Limited and Deputy President of the Royal Society for the encouragement of the Arts (RSA). The remaining vacancy on the Board will be filled in March 2006.

Martin Johnson

New QAA logos

The launch of our new *Strategic plan 2006-11* coincides with the revision of our corporate logo. The QAA logo will be used UK-wide.

The new QAA Scotland logo will be used only for Scotland-specific information.



Jean Lawton

Reader survey

We are seeking feedback to improve *higher quality* for our readers. We would be grateful if you could take five minutes to complete a short questionnaire on our website: (www.qaa.ac.uk/news/higherquality/hq20).

A small sample of readers will also get a printed questionnaire with this copy of *higher quality*.

If you are part of this sample, please complete the form and return it to us in the FREEPOST envelope provided. The last date for responses is Friday 5 May 2006.

If you have any queries, please email hqfeedback@qaa.ac.uk

Conferences and events

Contact health@qaa.ac.uk

28 March	Major review stakeholder event	Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre, London
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Contact HealthCon@qaa.ac.uk

27 June	Third annual PQAF national conference	International Convention Centre, Birmingham
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Contact s.melvin@qaa.ac.uk

3 April	Round table meeting: Assessment of students (Welsh institutions only)	Wales Millenium Centre, Cardiff
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Contact subscribers@qaa.ac.uk

6 June	Annual subscribers' meeting (invitation only)	Radison SAS Hotel, Glasgow
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QAA publications

Date	Publication
January 2006	<p>The <i>Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education</i> - drafts for consultation (responses by 24 March 2006)</p> <p><i>Section 6: Assessment of students</i></p> <p><i>Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review</i></p> <p><i>Section 10: Admissions to higher education</i></p> <p><i>Outcomes from institutional audit papers (web only):</i></p> <p><i>Assessment of students</i></p> <p><i>Learning support resources (including VLEs)</i></p> <p><i>Programme monitoring arrangements</i></p> <p><i>Validation and approval of new provision, and its periodic review</i></p> <p>Quality Assurance News for healthcare education - No 9</p> <p>Institutional audit interim reviews - consultation paper (responses by 17 March)</p>

Quality assurance in UK higher education: a guide for international readers
(in Arabic, Chinese and Spanish)
Healthcare benchmark statement: audiology

- February 2006 Handbook for the revised institutional audit method - draft for consultation
(responses by 25 April)
- March 2006 QAA *Strategic plan 2006-11*
QAA *Strategic plan 2003-05: report on achievements*
QAA Directors' report and financial statements (web only)
QAA *Annual review 2004-05*
Learning from higher education in further education in England 2003-05
- Outcomes from institutional audit papers (web only):*
Collaborative provision
International students and their support
Progression and completion statistics
Work-based and placement learning, and employability
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QAA's publications are available at
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Please email 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.

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