



Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers): Guidance for Facilitators

Annex 4 of the Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) Handbook describe the role of the Facilitator, what knowledge and skills the Facilitator needs to have, and the protocols the Facilitator should follow. This document provides further detail on the role of the Facilitator at each stage of the review process.

Before the visit

You are welcome to telephone or email the QAA Officer coordinating your review, if you have any questions about the review process. The QAA Officer can provide advice about the review process but cannot act as a consultant for your preparation for review, or comment on whether your quality assurance processes meet the applicable Core/Common practices of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education: that is the job of the review team.

The preparatory meeting

What is it and what will happen?

The preparatory meeting takes place approximately 18 weeks before the review visit (and this can be a virtual meeting). The purpose of the meeting is:

- to answer any questions about the review
- to agree the information you are going to provide to the review team
- to discuss any information QAA has assembled from other sources
- to confirm the practical arrangements for the review visit.

Further information about the preparatory meeting is in Section 3 of the Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) Handbook.

Who should attend?

The meeting should involve those who are most immediately involved with the production of the self-evaluation document and the student submission, including the Facilitator and Lead Student Representative. Attendance by other staff should be confined to those with responsibility for the operational arrangements for the review. The QAA Officer can give you further guidance about who should attend.

What to do before the preparatory meeting?

- Ensure you have studied the Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) Handbook and the online briefing materials before the preparatory meeting, and have contacted the QAA Officer if any additional clarification is required.
- In consultation with the QAA Officer and the Lead Student Representative, fix the date of the preparatory meeting well in advance, allowing plenty of time for arrangements at the provider to be finalised. The date chosen should be considered carefully to facilitate the participation of staff and students. The meeting may be conducted virtually or at the provider.

- Where applicable, discuss possible attendance at the preparatory meeting by representatives of awarding bodies.
- As early as possible, in collaboration with the Lead Student Representative, consider the arrangements for ensuring appropriate student attendance.
- Give preliminary consideration to the organisation of the review visit to inform discussions with the QAA Officer, especially on the timing of meetings with students and employers.
- Brief other attendees about the nature of Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) before the preparatory meeting.

Document upload: the self-evaluation document and student submission

After the preparatory meeting, you will have around six weeks to upload your provider's self-evaluation document and accompanying evidence to the secure electronic folder. This deadline also applies to the student submission. How you do this will be explained to you by your QAA Officer at the preparatory meeting. There is technical guidance included in Annex 3 of the Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) Handbook and practical instructions will also be provided.

Additional evidence

Nine weeks before the review visit the QAA Officer will inform you of any additional information requested by the review team following their analysis of the self-evaluation document and the student submission. This will be limited to information that the team requires to finish the desk-based analysis. Any additional information will need to be provided at least six weeks before the review visit.

First team meeting

About four weeks before the review visit, the review team will meet to discuss its analysis of the documentary evidence, decide on issues for further exploration during the review visit, decide on whether it requires further evidence, and to agree the length and proposed structure of the visit. Although the Facilitator will not be involved with the meeting, the QAA Officer will contact you soon afterwards to tell you of the duration of the visit, the team's main lines of enquiry, whom the team wishes to meet, and any further requests for documentary evidence. This will help you to plan for the review visit.

After the first team meeting

The Facilitator is the primary contact for the QAA Officer during the preparations for the review and should oversee all preparations. Once the visit timetable has been agreed, the Facilitator is responsible for:

- agreeing with the QAA Officer the arrangements for providing any additional information requested by the team
- taking care that you fully understand the review visit timetable
- disseminating the timetable for the review visit to colleagues
- working with the Lead Student Representative to ensure that the student representative body is informed of, and understands, the progress of the review
- briefing all participants on their roles within the review, including times when they need to attend meetings and other review visit activities
- making arrangements to ensure you are available throughout the review visit.

Specific preparations for the review visit may include:

- providing a briefing for colleagues
- working with the Lead Student Representative to provide a briefing for students
- liaising with awarding bodies/awarding organisations about the details of their contribution (as appropriate)
- deciding who should attend meetings with reviewers
- arranging rooms and other facilities, including internet access and refreshments
- ensuring that all relevant documentation is readily available, as agreed with the QAA Officer.

The review visit

Overview of the visit

The review team will normally arrive at its accommodation on the evening before the review is due to start. Review activity will, therefore, begin first thing on day one of the review. You will be familiar with the programme for the review by this time.

The programme of activity will extend from one day to a maximum of five days. The activity carried out at the visit will not be the same for every review but may include meetings with staff, external examiners, awarding body/organisation staff, recent graduates and employers. The review team will ensure that its programme includes meetings with a wide variety of students, to enable it to gain first-hand information on students' experience as learners and on their engagement with the provider's quality assurance and enhancement processes.

Activities at the provider will be carried out by at least two review team members, although it is envisaged that most activities will involve the whole review team. Where the team splits for an activity, there will be catch-up time afterwards so that all members of the team have a shared understanding of what has been found.

The Facilitator and Lead Student Representative will be invited to contribute to the review visit and their involvement will have been discussed at the preparatory meeting. The Facilitator and Lead Student Representative will not be present with the team for its private meetings. We expect the review team to have regular contact with the Facilitator and Lead Student Representative, perhaps at the beginning and end of the day, or when they are invited to clarify evidence or provide information. The Facilitator and Lead Student Representative can also suggest informal meetings if they want to alert the team to information which it might find useful.

What might you do?

In advance of the review visit:

- help staff prepare for meetings by clarifying their role and nature
- ensure that the room used for the meeting is suitable - the review team will decide how it wants the seating to be arranged and will want to be in the room before the staff and student participants arrive
- as Facilitator, you can normally observe any of the team's meeting with staff (but not with students)
- if you have a leading role in the provider's management of higher education, you may need to make a contribution to the meeting in that role - if so, make it clear that you are speaking in this role and not as the Facilitator.

After meetings, the review team will meet to confirm what it has just heard. You will not be present at this meeting.

You may find it useful to refer back to the guidance in Annex 4 of the Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) Handbook, which details the responsibilities of the Facilitator.

Final meeting between review team and the higher education provider

The programme will include a final meeting between the team and senior staff of the provider, the Facilitator and the Lead Student Representative. This will not be a feedback meeting but will be an opportunity for the review team to summarise the major themes and issues that it has pursued (and may still be pursuing). The intention will be to give the provider a final opportunity to offer clarification and/or present evidence that will help the review team come to secure review findings.

Final day

On the final day of the review visit, the review team considers its findings in order to:

- decide on the judgments
- agree the features of good practice that it wishes to highlight
- agree recommendations for action by the provider
- agree affirmations.

You can find more detail about the factors that teams use to make judgments in the Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) Handbook.

Please note that the Facilitator and Lead Student Representative are not involved in these discussions and the review team will not report back at the end of the day. There is no oral feedback on the proposed outcomes. Instead, two weeks after the end of the review, a letter setting out the provisional key findings will be sent to the provider and to the Home Office (and the provider's awarding body/bodies/organisation(s) where applicable).

After the visit

You will continue to have an important role to play as a channel of communication between the provider and the review team. You are likely to see a pre-publication draft of the report when it is sent to the provider and may be involved in preparing the provider's response and/or in producing their action plan - see Annex 10 of the Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) Handbook for further information on the action plan.

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