



## **Changes to Higher Education Review for 2015-16: a note for providers preparing for reviews**

### **Purpose of this guidance note**

1 The revised *Higher Education Review: Handbook for Providers* (the Handbook) will be published in June 2015 and is expected to contain some changes to the Higher Education Review (HER) method for 2015-16. This guidance note has been produced to explain the extent of these changes to providers with review visits scheduled for 2015-16, and who may be preparing their self-evaluation documents (SEDs) and student submissions in advance of the publication of the revised Handbook.

### **Background**

2 Part 5 of the Handbook explains that HER 'is organised on a rolling basis rather than a fixed cycle, with the possibility of changes to the process being introduced at any point, given sufficient justification and warning.'

3 There are three kinds of possible changes: operational, minor and major.

4 Operational changes are defined as those which have no substantive bearing on the provider's experience of the operation or outcome of the review process. They would include, for example, a decision to change the medium of published reports or to alter the system the reviewers use to communicate with one another.

5 Minor changes are to the design and/or operation of the method but not to the principles underpinning it. They may include:

- changes to the thresholds used to determine the scale of the provision and, therefore, the size of the review team
- changes to the guidance on the duration of review visits
- broadening opportunities for stakeholders to provide input to the review team (for instance, to include staff).

6 Major changes would include:

- changes to the number and/or content of the judgements or some other fundamental amendment to the scope of the review, such as the abolition of the thematic element
- changes to the interval between reviews.

7 The Handbook allows operational changes to be made by QAA at any time without reference to any other body and to be reported to the Higher Education Review Group (HERG). HERG is responsible for agreeing whether any other changes proposed by QAA are minor or major. Minor changes will be agreed by the QAA Board. Major changes may be proposed by the QAA Board, agreed in principle by HEFCE and DEL, and then be subject to full consultation.

8 Changes will be communicated to providers and review teams, and the date from which the change will be in operation will be made clear. It is envisaged that no operational or minor change will affect a review that has already started. For this purpose, the start of the review is deemed to be 16 weeks before the review visit (the timing of the preparatory meeting). A minor change would affect all other reviews yet to be carried out.

9 A major change would be introduced in time for the beginning of a tranche of reviews (that is, those operating within one academic year) in order to be able to distinguish easily the point at which different versions of the method became operational. This will also provide time to brief providers adequately and, where necessary, provide refresher training or briefing for review team members.

10 Alongside any changes to the method, the Handbook is also updated annually to reflect changes to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code).

## **Changes to the HER method and impact on providers**

11 Table 1 (page 3) sets out the operational changes to HER agreed for 2015-16. The table contains a brief description of each change and the reasons for it.

12 In addition, three minor changes have been proposed. These changes are subject to ratification by the QAA Board in June 2015, but will not have any significant impact on the preparation of SEDs and student submissions.

13 No major changes to the method have been proposed.

14 There are no changes proposed to the Quality Code.

## **Changes to the text**

15 A number of changes to the text of the Handbook will be made for the purposes of clarifying or confirming existing practices which may be regarded as unclear or implicit in the current version. These changes are summarised in Table 2.

## **Summary**

16 This guidance note sets out within the required 16 weeks the changes which will apply to providers with review visits scheduled for the autumn term 2015. The changes, both those which are explained in the tables below and those which are yet to be ratified by the QAA Board in June 2015, are not considered to have any significant impact for the method in 2015-16 or for the work providers will be undertaking in preparation for their reviews.

**Table 1: Operational changes to HER**

	<b>Change</b>
1	Shorten the notice given to providers of the size and membership of the review team and name of QAA Review Manager from approximately 40 to approximately 26 weeks before the review visit. This will increase the efficiency of reviewer training and the deployment of reviewers.
2	Bring forward the approximate date of the preparatory meeting from 16 to 18 weeks before the review visit. This will allow more time for the provider to make improvements to the SED and student submission should the preparatory meeting reveal any potential shortcomings. The date of the preparatory meeting will remain subject to mutual agreement.
3	Make provision to extend the deadlines in the post-visit timeline by up to two weeks for reviews taking place less than 16 weeks before Christmas. The current schedule affects the ability of providers and reviewers to meet the standard timeline over the Christmas period.

**Table 2: Other changes to the text of the Handbook**

	<b>Change</b>
1	Clarification in Annex 3 ('Evidence base for Higher Education Review, including the self-evaluation document') that Indicators of sound practice are not intended to operate as a checklist and that there is, therefore, no expectation that providers will structure their SEDs according to the Indicators.
2	Clarification that the duration of review visits is in whole days and that half days (for example, two-and-a-half days) are not possible.
3	Clarification that the preparatory meeting is not intended to be a vehicle for briefing a large number of staff at the provider about the review process. The preparatory meeting should involve those who are most immediately involved with the production of the SED and student submission, and be focused on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• answering any questions about the review which remain after the briefing</li> <li>• discussing the information to be provided to the review team</li> <li>• discussing the information QAA has assembled from other sources</li> <li>• discussing the theme</li> <li>• confirming the practical arrangements for the review visit.</li> </ul>
4	Confirmation that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• there are no restrictions on which types of staff can be reviewers. Heads of institutions are therefore eligible for this role</li> <li>• student reviewers and lead student representatives (LSRs) cannot hold senior staffing positions. This is intended to more robustly protect the spirit of the engagement of students in the review process, either as LSRs or reviewers. However, the possibility of students holding staffing positions will not be ruled out, otherwise it would prevent the involvement, for example, of postgraduate students who are engaged in small amounts of teaching.</li> </ul>