



Annual Review



2021

Introduction from QAA's Chief Executive

The word 'extraordinary' has been used a lot over the last two years, but 2021 was certainly an extraordinary year to take over as QAA's new Chief Executive. As UK higher education continued to navigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, so too did QAA. We'd refocused our full work programme to support the sector response to the pandemic; closed our offices around the UK and moved to homeworking; and begun to chart a path forward for both the agency and the sector.

As we now enter a new chapter for QAA, we do so with strong foundations, rooted in the sector's shared commitment to quality and standards. It's thanks to the support of our members that we were able to focus on delivering for you – even in an extraordinary context. We welcomed over 20 new members; today we have more than 290 members – a commitment from over 98% of UK universities.

QAA launched innovative new projects to support the enhancement of quality, from our membership Collaborative Enhancement Projects to our new Quality Evaluation and Enhancement of UK Transnational Higher Education Provision (QE-TNE) Scheme.

We have continued to support significant tertiary sector reform in Scotland and Wales, with enhancement at the core of cooperation; in Northern Ireland, too, we began development towards a tailored new enhancement model. We also deepened partnerships internationally, including through new agreements in the United Arab Emirates, China and Kazakhstan; capacity-building work in West Africa in collaboration with the World Bank and the Association of African Universities; and engagement in the INQAAHE and ENQA networks. Our international work allows us to share global practice and to enhance the reputation of UK higher education.

In the coming months and years, our agency will continue to respond to the impact of COVID-19 and the needs of the sector, with impartial services, thought leadership and dynamic member-focused enhancement activities. The challenges are – dare I say it – extraordinary, but I know that QAA will deliver its strategic priorities and explore new opportunities for collaboration. It is able to do so because of the confidence and trust placed in it by our members, and as ever we would like to thank you for making this possible.

Thank you.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'V. Stott'.

Vicki Stott
Chief Executive

Supporting quality enhancement among QAA Members

Working with our members and UK higher education partners, we developed a range of resources to address pressing sector issues.



Higher Education Credit Framework for England

We formally launched the second edition of the Higher Education Credit Framework for England, first developed in 2008. The revised publication aims to support providers in England to develop a flexible, transparent and consistent academic credit system.



Subject Benchmark Statements

166 member representatives have joined advisory groups for the 14 Subject Benchmark Statements due to be published in 2022.



Embedding student engagement

Student engagement continues to be central throughout QAA's work. This year we hosted two student-focused events – Quality Matters and Evolving Student Engagement – and developed a number of student-facing resources including a document to support student discussions on quality, standards and value for money.



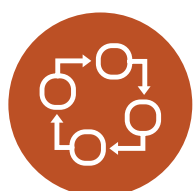
Academic Integrity Charter

Our Academic Integrity Charter, which was produced in collaboration with the UK Academic Integrity Advisory Group, was endorsed by UK Higher Education Ministers. To date, 180 institutions and bodies have signed up to the Charter.



Embedding sustainability across the curriculum

Working with Advance HE, QAA are supporting our members to embed Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) as part of curriculum design, teaching, learning and assessment through the development of revised ESD Guidance.



Supporting collaboration for quality enhancement

QAA provided £100,000 in funding to 13 Collaborative Enhancement Projects, enabling small groups of member institutions to work together to enhance the quality of student learning experiences and develop outputs to benefit the wider QAA Membership.



I really value the QAA Membership approach of bringing people together from across the sector to ensure that the kind of work that's being developed is future proofed.

Steve Taylor, Dean of Higher Education, Warwickshire College Group



Working with our members in 2020-21

279

providers across the UK signed up for QAA Membership in 2020-21

Members benefited from exclusive access to resources



138

resources for QAA Members:

94

Core Membership

23

Quality Insights

21

International Insights

Members attended a range of webinars, events and training



40

webinars

2,275 delegates

289 organisations



31

events and workshops

1,427 delegates

312 organisations



12

training programmes

243 delegates

130 organisations

4.4/5 ★

Satisfaction with the quality of content

Responding to and moving beyond the COVID-19 pandemic



new resources

To support providers in the adaptation and development of their provision in response to the challenges posed by the pandemic, QAA published 85 new resources.



Quality Compass series launched

A new Quality Compass series launched to provide thought leadership on future challenges and opportunities including the future of digital assessment, micro-credentials and hybrid learning.



New networks provided a space for colleagues from across QAA's Membership to come together and discuss shared challenges and new policy developments. Specific networks were established for Pro-Vice-Chancellors (PVCs) and college-based higher education providers, in addition to a member-wide network.

287

participants in

5

PVC Network briefings

85

participants in our new Policy and Practice Network for college-based higher education providers

237

participants from

135

member institutions at our biannual network events

QAA has been incredibly responsive and very quick to take the lead and be at the forefront of all the things that institutions need to think about. The thing I very much value is that they've not done that independently of the sector, they've done it with and for the sector, and I think that's really important.

Katie Akerman, Director of Quality and Standards, University of Chichester

Working across the UK

Northern Ireland:

- We led discussions with sector stakeholders in Northern Ireland and commissioned two projects to consider the needs of the sector as we seek to develop a new bespoke enhancement-led approach to quality assessment. The Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland has indicated interest in QAA undertaking a formal review of quality in Northern Ireland, and potentially implementing the new approach through a contractual arrangement.

Scotland:

- Four Enhancement-Led institutional Reviews (ELIR) were completed in November 2020, followed by three more in spring 2021.
- We hosted our International Enhancement Conference online in November 2020, bringing together 450 delegates from 26 countries to share innovative learning tools and practice from the Scottish Enhancement Themes and across the globe.
- Following completion of our 2017-20 Enhancement Theme, we launched our 2020-23 Enhancement Theme, focusing on Resilient Learning Communities. The new theme has begun with seven collaborative projects based on online discussions.

Wales:

- We completed three Quality Enhancement Reviews (QERs) and two Gateway Quality Reviews (GQRs) online.
- QAA was commissioned by HEFCW to complete a Review of HEFCW-funded Degree Apprenticeships during the 2020-21 academic year. We published the handbook for this review in October 2020 and, following successful completion of the reviews, published a sector-wide report summarising the findings in September 2021.
- Following discussions with providers in Wales and HEFCW, we published an addendum to the QER handbook – to reduce the scope of institutional reviews in 2021-22 to focus on HEFCW's statutory responsibilities. While quality enhancement will not form part of the scope of review activity, QAA will continue to engage with members in Wales to maintain their engagement in quality enhancement activity.

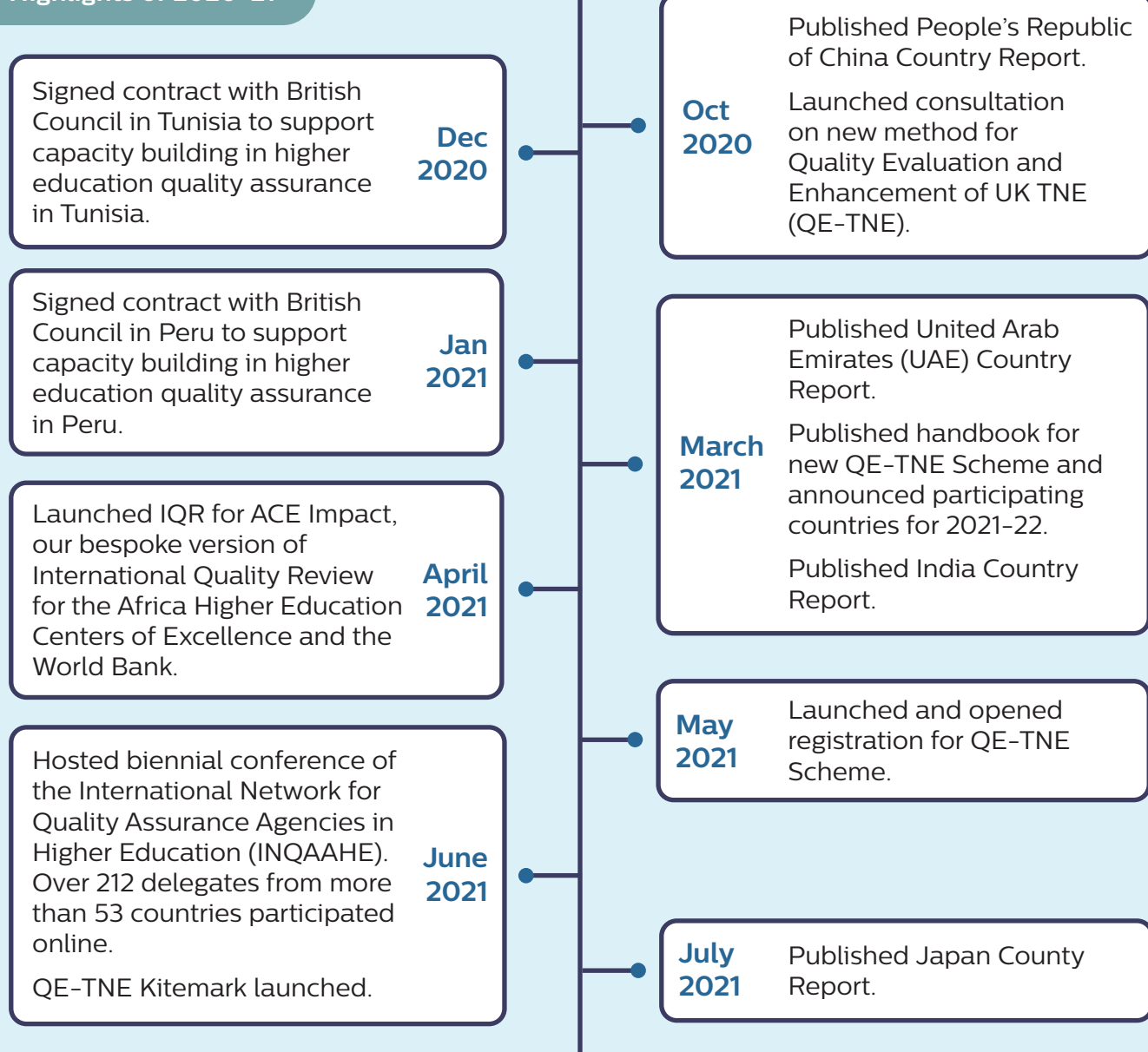
England:

Entirely separate from our membership work, as the designated quality body (DQB) in England, QAA works to OfS' commission to assess the quality of, and the standards applied to, higher education programmes delivered by providers in England.

- In 2020-21, we received 18 assessment referrals and completed 24 assessments, including commissions carried forward from the previous year.
- We also provide advice to the OfS regarding applications for degree awarding powers, through the Advisory Committee on Degree Awarding Powers (ACDAP), under delegated authority from the QAA Board. During 2020-21, ACDAP provided advice about nine providers, resulting in OfS authorising degree awarding powers to four of these.

Supporting our members and UK higher education internationally

Highlights of 2020-21



Transnational education

In 2019-20:



156

UK universities reported TNE activity



225

countries and territories operating TNE

over 453,000

students studying for UK awards outside of the UK

During the year, we developed our new scheme for the quality enhancement of UK transnational education (QE-TNE). This followed extensive consultation with the national and international higher education sector, involving participation from more than 100 representatives from over 20 countries and was warmly welcomed by overseas quality agencies and regulators.

QAA was commissioned to develop this scheme by Universities UK and GuildHE on behalf of the sector, and this programme will support the UK sector in enhancing the quality of its overseas provision, through peer review and exclusive access to global intelligence.

Accreditation

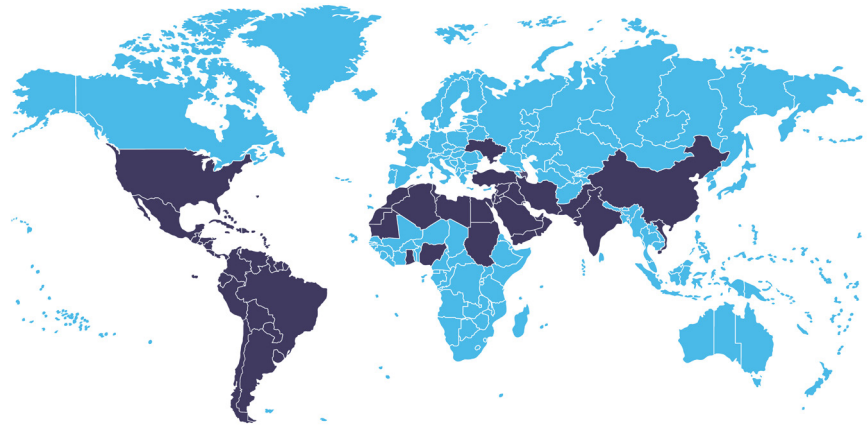
Following the launch of our new global accreditation mark in November 2019, we published two International Quality Review (IQR) reports during 2020-21 and more reviews are underway. IQR provides international institutions with an opportunity to achieve global accreditation, through a peer review where they are mapped against the European Standards and Guidelines. This provides confidence to the UK sector in the quality arrangements of international partners and facilitates the development of new transnational relationships.



Partnerships

We continue to strengthen our relationships with UK and international government departments and agencies, including the British Council, Department of International Trade, and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

Through our strong relationship with the British Council, we have developed partnerships in China, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, Central and South America, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Morocco, Ukraine, India, Vietnam, Tunisia and Pakistan. We also continue to build relationships in new countries including Peru, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, Ghana and Kuwait.



We signed new memoranda of understanding (MoU) with the Knowledge and Human Development Authority, United Arab Emirates (KHDA), SkillsFuture Singapore (SSG), the Chinese Service Centre for Scholarly Exchange (CSCSE), and the Independent Agency for Quality Assurance in Education, Kazakhstan (IQAA).

Our international partnerships provide us with access to global intelligence and international best practice which is then shared with our members and informs the development of QAA resources. Overseas activity informs QAA's core purpose of enhancing the quality of the student academic experience, as well as helping to build cross-border understanding and mutual trust and respect between higher education sectors.

QAA continues to play an active role in international quality networks across the globe, and this year QAA staff assumed key roles on a number of international boards and committees:

Douglas Blackstock

(former Chief Executive) - ENQA President

Gareth Crossman

(Head of Policy and Communications) - Chair of the ENQA Academic Integrity Advisory Group

Alastair Delaney

(Executive Director of Operations and Deputy Chief Executive) - Member of ENQA Agency Review Committee

Ian Welch

(Quality Specialist) - Chair of the Advisory Panel for Ukraine's National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance (NAQA)



Access to Higher Education Diploma

The Access to Higher Education Diploma is a qualification which prepares people without traditional qualifications for study at universities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. QAA has managed the scheme for the recognition and quality assurance of Access to HE courses since 1997.

There are currently 11 Access Validating Agencies (AVAs) licensed by QAA to approve Access to HE courses and to award QAA-recognised Access to HE qualifications to students - which apply to over 1,250 courses.

On behalf of our members, we work closely with UK governments, UCAS, Ofqual, Qualifications Wales and higher education providers to ensure the Diploma continues to help widen participation in higher education.

313

providers of Access to HE delivered courses

42,080

students registered onto an Access to HE Diploma in 2020-21

24,195

students were awarded the Access to HE Diploma in 2020-21

76%

students identified as female

24%

students identified as male

52%

students were 25 or over

16%

students were from black and minority ethnic background*

*Ethnicity data was not captured for approximately 37% of Access to HE Students.

To support the implementation of the Extraordinary Regulatory Framework (ERF) introduced in response to COVID-19:



37

information webinars for students and course providers, with over

800

registered attendees



11

webinars for internal moderators, with over

550

registered attendees



24,195

students supported to achieve their Diplomas through the ERF, including **325** who received the Diploma via the award through extenuation



32

online clinics for AVAs

Looking ahead: Academic year 2021-22



292

providers across the UK have chosen to renew or join QAA Membership (as of November 2021)

In 2021-22, our Membership offer spans five interconnected themes. These include UK-wide work to secure standards and quality, as well as enhancement activities, co-created with our members to ensure our activities are responsive to the different contexts in which members operate. These five themes are underpinned by a range of events, networking and training and development activity.



**Beyond COVID-19
- The Future of Digital
and Blended Delivery**



**Evaluation and
Data-Based
Decision-Making**



**Global
Engagement
and TNE**



**Creating Inclusive Learning
Communities - Flexible
Pathways and Pedagogies**



**Securing Academic
Standards and Quality**



We will deliver the first year of our QE-TNE Scheme which has 78 institutions participating, representing over 70% of the UK TNE student population. This Scheme aims to develop greater mutual trust, understanding and recognition between the UK and TNE host nations, while enhancing the quality of transnational education.



We will work with politicians, policymakers and regulators, engaging with proposed sector reforms in England, Scotland and Wales; working with UK governments so that the essay mill ban being implemented in England can be applied across all nations of the UK and working to agree a new quality review method for Northern Ireland.



QAA will celebrate its 25th anniversary in 2022, marking a quarter of a century as the leading authority on quality and standards in UK higher education. We will be planning a number of events to mark the occasion, in collaboration with our members and UK and international partners.