Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

Meeting of the Board of Directors

10 December 2025 on MS Teams

Present

Board Members

Rachid Hourizi (chairing the meeting)
Jimena Alamo
Nic Beech
Nicky Callow
Caroline Carter
Fazal Dad
Phil Deans
Alex Fraser
Odette Hutchinson
Lucy Jones
Richard Kaldhi
Karl Leydecker
Mirjam Plantinga
Dani Saghafi
Peter Vermeulen

Officers

Vicki Stott (Chief Executive)
Tom Yates (Executive Director of Corporate Affairs)
Caroline Blackburn (Chief Operating and Finance Officer)
Rob Stroud (Executive Director of Quality Assurance and Enhancement)
Rachel Hill-Kelly (Assistant Company Secretary)

Welcome, apologies and Chair's opening remarks

1. Rachid Hourizi welcomed members to the meeting. Apologies had been received from Christian Brodie, Alex Stanley and Moira Fischbacher-Smith.

Quorum and Interests (Item 2)

2. The meeting was declared quorate. No further declarations of interest had been received.

Minutes of the Meeting held on 23 October 2025 and Matters Arising from the Minutes (Item 3, BD-25-26-13) and Note of the Board Away Day 24 October 2025 (BD-25-26-14)

3. All actions were complete, and other matters arising were addressed elsewhere in the papers.

4. The minutes were **approved** as an accurate record.

5. The Board **approved** the note of the away day.

Chief Executive's report and report of policy developments and interactions with funders and regulators in the UK nations (Item 4 BD-25-26-15)

6. Vicki Stott provided an update on Executive team staffing. [redacted].

7. A plan was in place to manage the Business Development and Engagement team [redacted]. Caroline Blackburn would take over line management. Wendy Harbutt, a consultant with long experience of QAA, had been brought in to work alongside the Digital, Marketing and Communications team to assess demand from the agency, to help ensure strategic alignment of expectations, and to assist with delivery planning, as well as adding some capacity. Eve Alcock, QAA's Director of Public Affairs, would step in as strategic lead [redacted].

8. [redacted].

9. The job description for the Executive Director of Business Development and Engagement would be revised, [redacted], and recruitment to the vacancy would follow in due course.

10. VS presented the CEO report. [redacted] The proposal would be worked up further and brought back to the Board in due course. [redacted].

11. The next iteration of QAA's transnational education scheme (currently known as QE-TNE) had been developed. [redacted].

12. QAA continued to engage regularly with government departments. [redacted].

13. [redacted]. VS had suggested a workshop with QAA's standards team to underpin this thinking.

14. [redacted].

15. VS provided an update on her activities. She had met with the Sharjah Education Academy which had recently completed developing its standards and was interested in commissioning QAA to accredit those standards. She had also attended the College Development Network's awards dinner in Glasgow, where the work of the Scotland team to embedded itself in further education was evident, as was the high regard from the sector for the team.

16. [redacted].

17. VS had been invited to deliver the AHEP annual lecture on the topic 'collaboration without complication', which had been attended by over 150 people.

18. RS provided an update on work with Medr, which was still establishing its regulatory framework and the quality framework within that. QAA had engaged directly with Medr and responded to its public consultation, and was looking at how best to support its quality committee. [redacted].

19. [redacted].

20. [redacted]. **Action:** RS to follow up with NC.

21. Medr, the Scottish Funding Council and the Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland would continue their support of the QE-TNE scheme. The Public Affairs team had organised a round table on tertiary education and regional devolution.

22. Tom Yates had presented at a roundtable event organised by Nic Beech, considering tertiary and regional devolution; NB indicated there was potential to discuss the output at a future QAA Board meeting,

23. TY reported that, [redacted] Sara Drake had been appointed to conduct QAA's external governance review, which would take place in 2026. Sara was until recently CEO of the Chartered Governance Institute, and a former QAA Board member.

Strategic Risk Register (Item 5 BD-25-26-16)

24. TY presented the updated risk register. The risks around Artificial Intelligence (AI) had been separated into two separate risks in response to Board feedback. [redacted].

25. [redacted].

26. The Board **approved** the risk register subject to the comments made [redacted].

Annual Plan Update (Item 6, BD-25-26-17)

27. RS presented the update on the annual plan and key performance indicators. At this point in the year, most lines were yellow, indicating a reasonable degree of confidence that activity was on track to be completed by the end of the year.

28. [redacted].

29. [redacted].

30. The One QAA roadmap was complex, with a number of workstreams and priorities. Work on engagement activity with membership and other delivery areas remained on track.

31. [redacted].

Quarter 1 Forecast (Item 7, BD-25-26-18)

32. CB presented the forecast. [redacted].

33. The Business Development team believed there was opportunity to meet the target for international income, as the pipeline exceeded target. CB would drill into the detail of the pipeline to ensure there was capacity to deliver the work in-year.

34. [redacted].

35. The pipeline of contracts needed to be balanced against the available resource, as there could be spikes in workload. Attention was being given to how projects were resourced and integrated into planning.

Report on Financial Matters (Item 8, BD-25-26-19)

36. Caroline Blackburn presented the report. [redacted] CB hoped to bring an outcome

from the investment review to the March Board meeting.

37. [redacted].

38. [redacted].

39. QAA Enterprises had been dissolved.

40. The Board **approved** the report, noting that further investigation was required to test paragraph 8.

External Audit Findings Report (Item 9 BD 25-26-20)

41. Tara Westcott had presented the External Audit findings to ARC in November. It was a clean opinion, and a standard letter of representation. [redacted].

MC joined the meeting

HR Reports (Item 10 BD 25-26-21)

42. MC presented the HR reports. The Board noted that part of the One QAA workstream was looking at ways of working and ensuring wellbeing in a remote environment. There was a need for communication to be more intentional, and following the restructure there were new staff to embed culture with and build collaboration.

43. The Board noted that with the flexibility and remote working QAA had less direct impact on the working environment. Mental health was a concern in remote environments, and [redacted] Most staff were comfortable asking for needs to be met and there was a stipend for equipment and DSE assessments. The demarcation between work and home was important for maintaining boundaries and work-life balance

44. KL welcomed the reports. He queried whether conducting the staff survey annually was too frequent, suggesting that allowing more time between surveys might enable changes to embed and be reflected in the responses. **Action:** KL to follow up with MC on staff surveys.

45. Nic Beech raised the question of succession planning. [redacted].

46. The August pulse survey had highlighted two areas of concern: [redacted].

47. [redacted].

48. RS added that the changes to annual plan reporting were helpful in that it increased focus on delivery.

49. [redacted] MC agreed that benchmarking would be helpful. CB observed that the restructure had created new posts and the NMC contract had resulted in a significant number of new staff. She suggested reviewing not only this data but also investigating leavers and having sight of historical changes.

50. Caroline Carter asked about remote and flexible working; MC confirmed that QAA had a good picture of the impact on people's wellbeing and good practice was being shared internally.

51. [redacted].

MC left the meeting

28th Annual General Meeting with Company Members

Present

Board Members

Rachid Hourizi (chairing the meeting)
Jimena Alamo
Nic Beech
Nicky Callow
Caroline Carter
Fazal Dad
Phil Deans
Alex Fraser
Odette Hutchinson
Lucy Jones
Richard Kaldhi
Karl Leydecker
Mirjam Plantinga
Dani Saghafi
Peter Vermeulen

Authorised Company members representatives

Karl Leydecker (representing Universities Scotland)
Lucy Jones (representing GuildHE)
Beth Cooper (representing UUK)
Chris Laity (representing Universities Wales)

Officers

Vicki Stott (Chief Executive)
Tom Yates (Executive Director of Corporate Affairs)
Rob Stroud (Executive Director of Quality Assurance and Enhancement)
Caroline Blackburn (Chief Operating and Finance Officer)
Rachel Hill-Kelly (Assistant Company Secretary)

Resolutions

Resolution 1- Report to the Company Members of the Chair and Minutes of the 26th Annual General Meeting (Item 11, BD-25-26-22)

1. The Chair welcome board and company members to AGM. Apologies had been received from Christian Brodie, Alex Stanley and Moira Fischbacher-Smith.

2. The minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 11 December 2024 were **approved**.

Resolution 2- QAA Annual Report and Financial Statements 2023-2024 and QAAE Financial Statements (Item 12, BD-25-26-23)

3. The Annual report and financial statements were **approved**.

4. The Letter of Representation was **approved**.

5. The Board and Company Members resolved to authorise CB and TY to sign both documents.

6. The reappointment of Crowe as auditors for 2025-26 was **approved;** re-tendering for a QAA auditor would take place in 2026.

7. The chair closed the AGM.

QAA Board with Company Members

Update on Current Issues from the Chief Executive (Item 13, Oral Item)

8. VS presented an update on current issues. In Scotland the Tertiary Enhancement Quality Review method had been implemented and expanded as planned. Two reviews had been delivered and published, with both institutions receiving positive outcomes. Eight reviews were currently underway, and nine were scheduled for 2026–27. The enhancement programme (STEP) had also been launched, with the theme of diverse learner journeys, and was underpinned by a fully resourced team.

9. In Wales, the first full year of the Medr grant had seen activities to support enhancement, alongside support for developing the regulatory regime and quality cycle. Work continued on the Quality Enhancement Review method following the successful completion of the first two reviews.

10. In Northern Ireland, the Department for the Economy had confirmed that QAA was being commissioned to review quality arrangements. Other work remained constrained to QAA's membership offering. [redacted].

11. QAA had published a new set of Quality Code Advice and Guidance, and the remaining principles were in development for 2026. The new publications had been well received in the sector, and were also being actively used in policy and regulatory conversations as a reference point for quality.

12. QAA had submitted its follow-up report to ENQA, which had welcomed it and which recognised the restructure and reform undertaken as beneficial. Training around the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG), internal audit, and internal QA policies had been delivered, and QAA was contributing to the consultation on the reshaped ESG.

13. In QAA's work for the Nursing and Midwifery Council, it had needed to manage high volumes of activity, including one extraordinary assessment. A contract variation had been agreed; a new advisory committee of the Board had been established to oversee QAA's delivery [redacted].

14. International Quality Review (IQR) and International Programme Accreditation (IPA) had continued to grow, with strong pipelines in the UAE, Vietnam, Central Asia, and emerging markets elsewhere such as Canada. Work was underway to merge the Elective Quality Review in the UK with IQR.

15. The programme of Collaborative Enhancement Projects continued: phase 5 supported 17 projects across 70 institutions worldwide, and Phase 6 would be scaled up with larger funding and additional resources as a flagship project for QAA.

16. At policy level, QAA had acted as a key advisor on higher education reform and teaching standards, [redacted]. QAA had submitted evidence to the Covid-19 inquiry.

17. [redacted].

18. [redacted].

19. Department for Business and Trade and British Council projects in multiple priority countries had positioned QAA as a go-to partner on transnational education, ensuring that the UK policy perspective was embedded in international practice. The QE-TNE scheme had been revised through consultation, with some feedback sessions still to come. The new scheme was scheduled for launch in late February, and to begin in August 2026. UUK and GuildHE would commission the scheme, as before [redacted]. Medr had agreed to endorse it [redacted].

20. The new framework for the Access to HE recognition scheme had been introduced, strengthening assurance and providing a clearer basis for regulation. The potential for an international Access to HE diploma had been discussed by the relevant QAA committee, and would be considered later by the Board. [redacted].

21. The Chair asked about the extent to which strategic discussions at the recent Board away day were influencing QAA's direction of travel. VS noted that the Board's input had been very helpful in shaping thinking, and the Executive were working up business cases for a number of ideas that incorporated the Board's views on what the sector would find valuable. QAA would begin re-writing its strategy for 2027 onwards in the new year and would consult widely in sector to underpin its development.

22. [redacted]

23. The Chair thanked company members for attending.

Company members left the meeting

QAA Board/Committee Business

Annual Report on Complaints, Appeals and Legal Actions (Item 14, BD-25-26-24)

61. RHK presented the report. [redacted].

62. The Board noted that an Appeals Panel Chair and two Deputy Chairs had been appointed, meeting the recommendation from ENQA in their last report for a mechanism for greater consistency of appeal outcomes.

Access to Higher Education International Diploma Update (Item 15 BD-25-26-25)

63. RS provided an update on the international Access to HE diploma. [redacted].

64. It was noted that new and emerging risks associated with the international diploma had arisen that were not part of the landscape when work originally began pre-Covid; [redacted].

65. ARLC had reached the view that it could not recommend that the diploma proceed. QAA's recommendation was instead to discontinue the pilot. [redacted]. The CEO

would issue a letter to stakeholders to confirm the decision.

66. Rachid Hourizi commented, as chair of ARLC. [redacted].

67. [redacted].

68. The Board **approved** the recommendation to cease activity on the international Access to Higher Education diploma.

Committee Reporting (Item 16, BD-25-26-26)

69. NMC Contract Advisory Committee: Lucy Jones reported that the committee had fed in to the Audit and Risk Committee [redacted]. Changes were proposed to the committee's terms of reference, relating to terminology and the appointment of a 'lay' member, an expert by experience or a user. The Board **approved** the changes to the terms of reference

70. Student Strategic Advisory Committee: Jiji Alamo reported that an in-person induction day had been held for new SSAC members. At its first meeting, SSAC had agreed its priorities as follows:

    - The cost of engagement for students;
    - Supporting students to understand artificial intelligence; and
    - Positioning SSAC within the wider Agency and sector.

71. Rob Stroud noted that student engagement had been identified in previous QAA annual plans [redacted]. This work had now been taken to SSAC to align internal resources and make progress. SSAC would be asked to contribute to the development of the new strategy. The Chair emphasised the importance of student engagement and asked whether any input was required from the wider Board. Jimena Alamo confirmed that nothing was needed at present but suggested that input to priorities might be sought later in the year.

72. Consultative Board: TY reported on the November meeting, which had included the usual round of stakeholder updates. The meeting included a presentation [redacted] on degree verification work, fraudulent providers and those operating in a 'grey area' in which bona fides were unclear or ambiguous. The number of such providers was significant and exceeded the number of OfS-registered providers. This issue would be brought back to a future Consultative Board meeting for further discussion following discussions between sector bodies.

73. The Audit and Risk Committee had approved its annual report to the Board (Item 17) and received the report on QA's compliance with the Welsh Language Measure. [redacted].

74. Access, Recognition and Licensing Committee: RH reported on ARLC's meeting on 8 December. At that meeting, the Committee had discussed the first three AVAs progressing through the new scheme and considered a request for a five-year licence. ARLC would make a recommendation to the March Board.

Audit and Risk Committee's Annual Report to the Board (Item 17, BD-25-26-27)

75. KL presented the report. The annual report to the Board provided an illustration of the depth of scrutiny by ARC. The key focus for next year for the Committee would

be the tender and appointment of an auditor. At the point of retendering, consideration would be given to length of contract [redacted].

76. Dani Saghafi was now taking over as chair of ARC; the Board noted this and thanked KL for his service.

Any Other Business

77. There was none. The Chair thanked the Board for their engagement in the year and the QAA team for support.

Date of the next meeting

78. The next meeting would be held on Wednesday 11 March 2026.

Board of Directors Action List				
Minute:	**Action:**	**Owner:**	**Due Date:**	**Update:**
25-26-20	**Action:** RS to follow up with NC on joint self-evaluation project	RS		
25-26-44	**Action:** KL to follow up with MC on staff surveys	KL		