Context of our move to membership

The way QAA works, is commissioned and funded is evolving. As a result, we need to set out what work we undertake and services we offer in each of the UK’s home nations. Each is now different in a significant series of ways - the policy context is diverse, student fees and student support are different, the work that QAA is asked to do is distinctive and how it is funded or paid for is different. The relationship we have with providers is also special.

Northern Ireland’s higher education sector is small, and, up to now, it has largely followed quality assurance approaches in England or UK-wide. However, the increasingly distinctive approach in each of the Home Nations introduces the possibility of developing a tailored approach to quality for higher education in Northern Ireland, firmly set within its policy and economic context. QAA has extensive experience of designing and delivering tailored quality assurance approaches and hopes that the new membership model will enable us to work with universities, university colleges and further education colleges, together with DfENI, to offer an approach to quality assurance and enhancement that fits Northern Ireland’s distinctive needs yet aligns with UK-wide approaches. Decision-making on the next steps is at present limited by the political situation.

Our work has been funded by institutional subscriptions, small contracts for services with DfENI and through the contribution of DfENI to UK-wide activity (currently managed by OfS).

QAA continues to be supported by providers, regulators and funders to undertake a core set of UK-wide activity. This will form the heart of membership across the UK. All subscribers in Northern Ireland are automatically members of QAA with full access to services and resources.

QAA’s work in Northern Ireland

Our work in Northern Ireland will continue to embrace:

- Contributing to the maintenance and development of UK-wide reference points such as the UK Quality Code and other frameworks and tools.
- Maintenance and development of international partnerships and engagement to support UK HE in its work and operation internationally.
- Through partnership supporting the active participation of students in our work and in quality enhancement in Northern Ireland.

Looking ahead, we are working to:

- Develop a new enhancement-oriented review method drawing on the experience of enhancement review in smaller sectors; to be developed in conjunction with stakeholders and designed for Northern Ireland.
- Support DfENI in the development of thinking on a future quality framework for Northern Ireland.
- As part of the resulting approach, help identify and disseminate good practice and explore areas for development.
- Offer a dedicated programme of work, resources and events, and provide access to other QAA events that meet the needs of providers in Northern Ireland.
QAA’s work UK-wide

Policy and issues

QAA will continue to respond to emerging and vital issues on behalf of the sector as part of its overall service. Recent examples of our leadership, our ability to ensure voices and perspectives from across the UK and our role as a catalyst in this context include:

- policy and guidance on contract cheating and academic integrity
- bringing together representatives from across the UK to develop the characteristics statement on higher/graduate/degree apprenticeships - seeking to ensure that apprenticeships meet the needs of employers UK-wide and enabling apprentices to move around the UK
- innovative commissioned research looking at how student opinion can be used as an indicator of quality (The Wisdom of Students: Monitoring Quality through Student Reviews)
- work with UUK and GuildHE on degree standards and outcomes.

UK-wide frameworks and tools

QAA will continue to support the development and maintenance of:

- the UK Quality Code
- the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (including contributing to continued compatibility and referencing with European qualifications frameworks as part of the Bologna Process)
- updating and evolving Subject Benchmark Statements.

International partnership and engagement

QAA will continue to engage with a wider international network of quality assurance agencies in order to:

- contribute to, and help shape, quality assurance, leading, listening and learning
- helping to ensure the voice of the UK remains strong and informs developments.

We will:

- maintain a series of strategically important MoUs
- work with local agencies and governments to extend the understanding of the quality of UK HE, increase cooperation and mutual recognition
- seek to minimise obstacles and reduce the regulatory burden on UK providers in delivering TNE
- research and publish material such as Country Reports, organise events, deliver insight webinars and short papers alongside case studies and news updates.

General services

Members from Northern Ireland will be able to access QAA’s Annual Conference, UK-wide events, guidance, newsletters and updates. These kinds of activities will either be free to members or offered at special rates.

To be decided/finalised

Proposals for the continued review of UK HE’s TNE are yet to be finalised. At present a UUK/GuildHE/QAA working group is looking to propose a UK-wide solution that will continue to provide the assurance sought by quality assurance agencies, governments and students internationally. More details will be available in due course.