



Guidance Note for Applications for Educational Oversight by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA)

This note provides guidance on the application process for educational oversight. From 1 August 2019, the Office for Students (OfS) has been the educational oversight body for providers eligible to register with them, meaning that eligible providers wishing to acquire or maintain a Tier 4 licence, must register with the OfS. The OfS is also the body for providers requiring specific course designation. If, after reading the published guidance on the [OfS website](#), you are unsure of your eligibility to register with the OfS, the registration team can be contacted through the following email address: registration@officeforstudents.org.uk

QAA will continue to be an educational oversight body only for those providers not eligible to register with the OfS, because, for instance, they are not based in England/do not satisfy the definition of an English higher education provider as defined by section 83 of the Higher Education Research Act. Providers who are not required to register with the OfS but wish to have an external quality assurance review, can also apply to QAA to be reviewed as a voluntary arrangement. Please email assessmentservices@qaa.ac.uk if you have any specific questions.

Applicants for educational oversight by QAA should see this as the start of a long-term relationship. Educational oversight involves a full QAA review in the year following the application and an annual return in subsequent years.

Providers that satisfy the 'requirements of providers seeking and maintaining educational oversight' set out in the application form, will undergo a review for educational oversight by QAA approximately six months after receipt of application. Reviews will either be Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers), Educational Oversight-Exceptional Arrangements, Higher Education Review (Foreign Providers) or Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight as appropriate for the type of provider as determined by QAA. There is a separate application form and review process for educational oversight of exceptional arrangements such as joint ventures.

A successful application at this stage does not guarantee that a provider will ultimately be successful in achieving educational oversight.

The handbooks for educational oversight reviews are available on the QAA website and contain full information about the review processes.

The application form must be submitted to QAA electronically as a Word document to: applications@qaa.ac.uk with supporting documents and fees.

The application process

QAA will use the application form for educational oversight to:

- determine the eligibility of an applicant for educational oversight by QAA
- provide the Home Office with a list of successful applicants who have met the eligibility criteria for educational oversight and will be scheduled for review
- enable QAA to allocate applicants to a type of educational oversight review and develop a schedule of review activity.

Your summary of how you use external reference points, including the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code), will be scrutinised against supporting documentation to assess your initial suitability for a review for educational oversight.

A successful application at this stage does not guarantee that a provider will ultimately be successful in achieving educational oversight.

How to complete the application form

The application form should be completed in black type and in accordance with this guidance note. It must be submitted electronically as a Word document to applications@qaaacuk.onmicrosoft.com

The submission of this form, together with the application fee and accompanying documentation, is the first stage in the process for obtaining educational oversight by QAA. It is essential that all information provided in the application form is accurate and complete, otherwise your application will be returned and you may not be eligible for review.

Please note that this activity is exempt from VAT and therefore no VAT is chargeable.

There are four parts to the application form:

Part 1: Information about the provider

Part 2: Student headcount and higher education programme details

Part 3: Evaluation of quality assurance arrangements

Part 4: Supporting information.

Part 1: Provider information

All applicants for educational oversight must be registered at Companies House or be a registered charity.

Provider's name	This is the published name on the provider's website
UKPRN www.ukrip.co.uk	
Contact name	The name of the individual who is the primary point of contact for educational oversight
Job title of contact	Full job title
Email address of contact	Email address of primary educational oversight contact
Telephone numbers of contact	Direct landline and mobile number of primary educational oversight contact
Name and job title of head of provider	Full name and complete job title
Provider's name/legal title	Registered company name and/or legal title
All names by which the provider has been known over the last three years	
Provider's legal identity	For example, company, partnership, sole trader
Registered company/charity address and registration number (as applicable)	Address recorded at Companies House and/or the Charity Commission - if you are a registered charity, please include your charity number
Ownership or significant beneficial interest (Please provide details of any company that owns or has a significant beneficial interest of the company applying for review, including company number(s))	
Operating address(es)	UK addresses of all relevant campuses, sites or offices that form a part of the provider - please identify the main campus address
First year of operation (or first-year higher education students enrolled)	First year: any type of student-attended lessons

Start date of first higher education programme delivered in the UK	The date when teaching for higher education students first started - providers must have taught higher education students (home or international), on qualifications approved for Tier 4 purposes for at least two years before applying for educational oversight
Provider's website address	
Provider's UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) sponsorship number	
Do you currently have a Tier 4 sponsor licence?	

Part 2: Student headcount and higher education programme details

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) and QAA work to ensure a commonality of approach. The information you provide in this application will confirm whether your provider:

- predominantly offers further education or English language programmes (below Level 4 on one of the UK qualifications' frameworks) and is therefore an appropriate provider for educational oversight by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI)
- predominantly offers higher education programmes (Level 4 and above on one of the UK qualifications' frameworks) and is therefore an appropriate provider for educational oversight by QAA.

Higher Education Review is a risk-based review method. The size of the team and the length of the visit is determined by the scale of higher education provision. Identifying the scale of the provision under review is a simple, formulaic process involving the application of thresholds to four quantitative measures. These measures are:

- the total number of higher education students (headcount)
- the number of postgraduate research students as a proportion of the total number higher education students
- the number of different degree-awarding bodies and other awarding organisations.

The size of the review team is determined incrementally by establishing a base size according to the total number of higher education students and then adding additional reviewers depending on a further two measures. The maximum team size will be five, regardless of what the measures indicate.

Please provide details of the total number of students (based on headcount and not full-time equivalents) enrolled on programmes over the last three years, including the current academic year.

Programmes and qualifications

Please provide information about the programmes and types of qualification you offer, detailing: their corresponding level in *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), *Scottish Credit Qualifications Framework* (SCQF), *Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales* (CQFW), *Regulated Qualification Framework* (RQF) and relevant Subject Benchmark Statements; the awarding body/organisation; and the number of students enrolled on the programme in the current academic year. You may wish to refer to any external reference points, including the Quality Code for Higher Education.

Awarding bodies and awarding organisations

Providers must have a current written agreement to offer programmes that are accredited by either an awarding body (a higher education institution with degree awarding powers) or an Ofqual-regulated awarding organisation, or must be an Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) approved learning partner at either Gold or Platinum level.

Please list all awarding bodies and awarding organisations that validate your awards. For each awarding body or organisation, please provide the name, email address and phone number for both the principal contact and the provider's local contact at the awarding organisation.

Existing or previous quality assurance experience

Please provide information about any Ofsted, ISI or any other recognised quality assurance body review or inspection that you have undergone in the last four years.

Part 3: Evaluation of your quality assurance arrangements

We ask applicants to submit a short evaluation of their quality assurance arrangements (no more than 1,000 words) with their application form, and to evidence it. The evaluation should show how the provider uses relevant external reference points, including the Quality Code, to assure itself that its higher education provision meets the expectations of the sector in the UK and that its programmes are managed effectively. The evaluation and evidence will be key parts in the initial assessment made by QAA to decide on eligibility for educational oversight. This evaluation statement will be used for the application process only, not for the review itself.

Part 4: Supporting information

In this section, please provide evidence to support the statements made above. This should be submitted electronically to applications@gaaacuk.onmicrosoft.com. Please indicate in the tick box that you have included each document. If you are unable to include a document, please explain why.

Document	Notes
Copy of your strategic plan	This is not mandatory but should be supplied if it exists.
Details of provider's constitution, governance and accreditation arrangements	
If relevant, provider's most recent accreditation report	For example, British Accreditation Council, Accreditation Service for International Colleges.
Evidence that the provider has been delivering higher education programmes in the UK for at least two (academic) years at the date of application	<p>You must provide evidence that you have delivered higher education programmes for at least two (academic) years prior to the application. You must be delivering at least one programme that meets the requirements of an 'approved qualification' for Tier 4 sponsorship purposes.</p> <p>Evidence might take the form of student registrations with the awarding body/organisation, external examiner reports, annual monitoring reports, attendance records, and so on, that show the provider has been delivering higher education programmes for at least two (academic) years at the date of the application.</p>
Quality assurance procedures/manual (or equivalent)	This does not need to be one document. This includes (but is not limited to) documents such as policies and procedures for programme design and approval, admissions, annual monitoring, assessment and marking, learning and teaching, external examining, complaints and appeals, academic offences (including plagiarism), and public information.
Signed copies of agreement(s) with awarding bodies/ organisations	Please ensure these are current and signed copies. Providers that do not have a signed agreement in place with their awarding body/organisation will not be scheduled for a review.
Sample of programme annual monitoring reports (or equivalent) for the last academic year and, where available, for the previous year	See the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, Advice and Guidance: Monitoring and Evaluation.
Programme approval report (or equivalent)	See the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, Advice and Guidance: Course Design and Development. A representative sample will suffice.
Student attendance dates during the current academic year	Please inform us of the dates when students will be present at the provider.

Fees for educational oversight

QAA does not receive any funding to cover the direct costs incurred in educational oversight. Consequently, the costs of such activity must be borne by applicant organisations. QAA is a non-profit-making organisation.

Fees for educational oversight by QAA will be payable in three stages and are non-refundable:

- Stage 1: Application fee
- Stage 2: Review fee
- Stage 3: Annual maintenance fee for educational oversight.

Fees for educational oversight are published on the QAA website. These fees are reviewed on an annual basis and may be subject to increase.

Please note that this activity is exempt from VAT and therefore no VAT is chargeable.

Application fee

The application fee for educational oversight includes receipt and processing of an application by QAA. You will receive confirmation as to whether you are eligible for review. The Home Office will be notified of the status of your application.

In the event of an unsuccessful outcome, the application fee is non-refundable.

Fee for the financial sustainability, management and governance check

The financial sustainability, management and governance (FSMG) check is normally conducted in advance of the review. The fee for this check is non-refundable. If the applicant fails this check, the review may be cancelled.

Review fee

Applicant organisations will be notified of their eligibility for review within four weeks of the submission of applications. Successful applicants will be notified of the date of their review approximately four weeks after the submission of applications and will be advised of the review fee at this time. The review fee will be payable in full 18 weeks before the date of review.

In the event of an unsuccessful outcome, the review fee is non-refundable.

Annual maintenance fee

Providers seeking educational oversight by QAA are required to pay an annual maintenance fee. This includes the cost of the annual return and any monitoring visits/desk-based analyses but does not include the cost of a full review. The annual return and the monitoring visit/desk-based analysis fulfil the requirements of the annual health check.

How to pay the application fee

The application fee must be received with the application form and supporting documentation and must be made via BACS or bank transfer.

Our bank account details for payment are:

Account name:	The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
Sort code:	40-22-09
Account no:	92470233
IBAN:	GB74HBUK40220992470233
Swift:	HBUKGB4104H

Please ensure that your organisation name is included in the payment reference.

Please indicate on the application form which method of payment you have used. Please note that this activity is exempt from VAT and therefore no VAT is chargeable.

How QAA will process your application

QAA will acknowledge the receipt of all applications.

QAA will notify the provider and the Home Office whether providers are eligible to proceed to a formal review.

Within four weeks of the submission of applications, QAA will advise applicants of the status of their application and the next steps.

QAA will advise the Home Office and relevant awarding bodies/organisations of the outcomes of reviews and will publish all reports on the QAA website.

Further important information

Conflicts of interest

We require those individuals we propose to appoint to a review team to notify us of any connection or interest which might conflict with the work to be undertaken. Since much of QAA's activity is based on peer review, with an expectation that individuals who have worked or are working in the higher education sector will contribute to the maintenance of the reputation and standing of UK higher education, QAA does not consider that an individual working in a similar type of provider would, of itself, preclude that individual from serving as a member of a review team.

Complaints

QAA is committed to working in an open and accountable way, subject to any limitations placed upon it by external bodies. A complaint is taken to mean an expression of dissatisfaction with actions we have taken. Further information about the complaints procedure can be found on the [QAA website](#).

Confidentiality

QAA staff and individuals appointed to conduct work on our behalf are required to manage with care all documentation, papers, records, communications and other materials. Various policies demonstrate our concern for confidentiality, most notably those relating to electronic communications and data protection.

Individuals contracted by QAA may not at any time during, or for a period of five years after the termination of, a contract:

- divulge or communicate confidential information by any means whatsoever to any person, institution, body, company, business entity, media, or any other organisation
- use confidential information for their own purposes or for any purpose other than those of QAA
- through any failure to exercise due care and diligence, cause any unauthorised disclosure of any confidential information.

These obligations of confidentiality do not extend to information which:

- is in the public domain other than by reason of any act of omission on the part of a QAA member of staff or contractor
- was already known to the contractor prior to disclosure by QAA
- the contractor is required to disclose by law or by a requirement of a regulatory body.

QAA's Information Publication Scheme sets out how we manage information. Our policy on the disclosure of records can be found on the QAA website.

QAA may disclose such information concerning your provider to another body or person as it considers appropriate to assist with the discharge of QAA's functions to safeguard quality and academic standards in UK higher education or to assist with another body or person's own accreditation, regulatory or public functions, including, but not limited to: the Independent Schools Inspectorate; the Department for Education; the Charity Commission; the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator; the Office for Students and the Home Office.

QAA appreciates the need for discretion in managing applications for educational oversight, given commercial and other sensitivities involved. Providers should be aware, however, that there is considerable public interest in educational oversight. Consequently, you should be aware that, in applying for educational oversight by QAA, you are taking yourself out of the entirely private arena and into the public domain.

Offers of inducements or bribery

QAA recognises that there is significant commercial and reputational value attached to the granting of educational oversight. QAA staff, assessors, contractors, reviewers, trustees and committee members are not allowed to accept inducements such as hospitality (other than that provided as part of a detailed scrutiny), gifts, contracts, awards, shares or payment from any organisation that is subject or has been subject to an application for educational oversight. They are not allowed to trade in stocks and shares of applicant organisations nor divulge information which would advantage others who may do so.

Should applicant organisations offer inducements or attempt to bribe staff, assessors, trustees or committee members then the application will be suspended pending investigation by the appropriate authorities (for example, the police, Serious Fraud Office, Financial Services Authority, and so on).

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