

Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) Partial Review Process

Handbook for Providers

September 2021



Introduction

1 There are three instances where an alternative provider might be required to undergo a partial Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers):

- where an annual return confirms significant changes have taken place, or there are concerns about academic standards or quality that cannot be addressed through an extended monitoring visit
- where QAA has published a report into a full investigation of the provider under the Concerns Scheme
- where an alternative provider has received a judgement of 'requires improvement to meet UK expectations' in a full review.

2 In all of the instances above, QAA may determine that a full review is required instead of a partial review. Please note that where a provider receives a judgement of 'does not meet UK expectations', a full review will be required.

3 The purpose of this document is to give providers, QAA review teams and QAA Officers additional information to that which appears in the [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\) Handbook](#)¹ about the process for carrying out a partial review. As this process needs to be responsive to the circumstances of any given review (for example, the reasons for requiring a partial review instead of a monitoring visit, or how many unsatisfactory judgements there were in the previous full review), it is appropriate for it to be flexible. This document aims to provide a framework within which the follow-up process should take place, which enables all parties to plan and contribute effectively. It is published on the QAA website in line with our commitments to openness and transparency.

4 The partial review process follows the standard Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) Handbook (or equivalent for foreign providers and for Educational Oversight Exceptional Arrangements) with the following exceptions:

- between one to two judgement areas will be reviewed (at QAA's discretion)
- the timeline for the review process will be shortened
- a new report will be published, focused on the judgement areas reviewed
- there is no first team meeting
- the length of the review visit is determined in advance by QAA
- the partial review process will not normally be preceded by a Financial Sustainability, Management and Governance (FSMG) check.

5 Providers will be required to produce a new self-evaluation document (SED), and students may also voluntarily offer a student submission. The SED will include a brief introduction and context to the provider, and a report on the Expectations (and the associated applicable Core/Common practices) under review. Please see the guidance in the Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) Handbook for more information about producing a SED or student submission. Where the partial review is being carried out to redress failing judgements from a previous review or following a concerns investigation, the provider should also account for progress made with each action in the related action plan.

6 The scheduling of the partial review will be determined by QAA in discussion with the provider, having regard to the appropriate timeframe for review according to educational

¹ Alternatively, the [Higher Education Review \(Foreign Providers\)](#) or the [Educational Oversight - Exceptional Arrangements](#) handbooks, as applicable.

oversight or specific course designation requirements. In some cases, by mutual agreement, it may be possible to conduct the partial review according to shorter timescales than those set out in the relevant annual monitoring guidance note or review handbook. However, where the partial review is being carried out in response to a concerns investigation or failing judgements in an earlier review, QAA encourages providers to take sufficient time to address the issues identified in the original review, concern or annual return, before engaging in a partial review. It will be necessary for the review team to have evidence that new or revised processes have been implemented before different judgements can be considered.

7 The fee for the partial review will vary to reflect the duration of the partial review and how many reviewers are involved. The following table provides an indication of the likely fee. The full fee must be paid 12 weeks prior to the visit, in order for the partial review to take place. Where providers are required to undergo a partial review in place of a monitoring visit, the fee will be adjusted if the maintenance fee for that year has already been paid.

	One-and-a-half-day visit	Two-day visit	Three-day visit
Two reviewers	£13,190	£13,770	£15,440
Three reviewers	£16,760	£17,530	£19,750

8 The outcome of the partial review will be fresh judgements and a published partial review report. QAA will advise the Home Office of the review outcomes and advise the provider of the next steps. Please see the Home Office guidance² for the implications for Tier 4 Sponsorship.

9 A partial review will not reset the four-year cycle of full reviews, and the next full review will be scheduled to take place four years after the previous full review.

10 This version of the handbook (2021-22) maintains the following main change:

The COVID-19 (Coronavirus) outbreak has had significant and widespread consequences for the higher education sector. Given the information we have now, for those providers requiring Educational Oversight, QAA may conduct online reviews where necessary. We will continue to review this position based on the latest government and public health advice until such time as we can return to in-person visits.

The method as set out in the review handbook, will be followed to complete the Higher Education Review online. The scope of the evidence considered and the nature of the judgements will remain the same. The online reviews will continue to be a peer review process which is open and transparent. Operational milestones will remain the same but there will be some adjustments to the operation of the review visit to recognise the online format.

² Sponsor a Tier 4 Student: Guidance for Educators, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/student-sponsor-guidance>

Indicative timeline for a Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) partial review

11 The partial review visit will be up to three days, with a maximum of four reviewers. The length of the visit and team size will be determined by QAA in advance of the visit being scheduled.

Following submission of annual return, or on receipt of action plan from concerns investigation or full review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • QAA notifies provider of requirement for a partial review, confirms judgement areas to be reviewed and agrees dates for the visit • QAA notifies provider of QAA Officer and team • Provider reads HER (AP) (or equivalent) handbook and starts to prepare self-evaluation and evidence base. QAA Officer may offer guidance on the structure of the self-evaluation by telephone or email
-8 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provider uploads self-evaluation and supporting evidence, and team begins documentary analysis - where possible, providers are asked to facilitate the production of a student submission, which may be submitted at -2 weeks
-5 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team requests additional evidence (if required), and proposes a schedule for the visit, including who to meet
-2 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provider submits additional evidence (and student submission if available)
Afternoon/evening before partial review visit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team hold pre-visit meeting
0 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partial review visit to the provider
+2 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review team provide text for the partial review report
+2 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • QAA Officer sends key findings letter to provider, copied to Home Office
+4 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • QAA Officer sends draft report to the team
+6 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • QAA Officer sends draft report to the provider
+9 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provider responds to the draft report
+11 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report proofed and prepared for publication
+12 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report published on the web, or if a negative judgement, provider may submit an appeal

Updated September 2021

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Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

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