



# Quality Enhancement Review Addendum to the Handbook

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## Contents

Introduction .....	1
Section 1: External reference points and scope of Quality Enhancement Review .....	3
Section 2: Enhancement in Quality Enhancement Review .....	3
Section 3: Quality Enhancement Review method .....	3
Section 4: Judgements and findings.....	6
Section 5: Reporting, action plans and follow-up.....	6
Section 6: Review team .....	6
Annex A: Content of the Technical Report .....	7
Annex B: Judgements .....	8
Annex C: Summary of adaptations to Quality Enhancement Review for reviews taking place in 2021-22 .....	10

This addendum is published in both English and Welsh.

## Introduction

1 This addendum applies to Quality Enhancement Reviews (QERs) scheduled for the academic year 2021-22. It explains the adaptations that are being made to how QER is being delivered for this academic year and should be read in conjunction with the [QER Handbook](#) (2020). In addition to the addendum, QAA will hold a briefing for providers to explain these adaptations and discuss how these may be applied in practice.

2 On 15 February 2021, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) announced changes to external quality assurance review requirements in 2021-22 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic ([Circular W21/05HE](#)). HEFCW has agreed that all institutions should complete their review within a maximum seven-year review interval. However, the scope of the review will be streamlined to focus on HEFCW's statutory responsibilities to be assured of the quality of education provided by, or on behalf of, regulated providers. This means there will be no reported outcomes or recommendations regarding quality enhancement of the student learning experience and of learning and teaching in 2021-22.

3 Quality enhancement continues to be a key component of HEFCW's Quality Assessment Framework and while enhancement will continue to form part of QAA's regular engagement with institutions scheduled for QER in 2021-22, this activity will not result in published outcomes or judgements. QAA will work with these providers to maintain their engagement in, and contribution to, quality enhancement activities in Wales (see paragraph 10 and Section 2).

4 A key feature of the approach for 2021-22 is to encourage providers to focus their review preparations effectively and to minimise any burden of over-preparation. This addendum also sets out how QAA will similarly respond to minimise the review burden on providers now that the scope of QER is focussed on quality assurance.

5 While this addendum sets out the approach for QERs focusing on quality assurance, this does not exclude providers from wishing to include quality enhancement within the scope of their review. If this is the case, the provider should agree the scope of their QER with QAA at an early stage, at the point of agreeing the review schedule, as well as informing HEFCW of their intention not to take up the adjustments to the method. For those providers wishing to proceed according to the original scope of QER, the review will be conducted in accordance to the review handbook published in March 2020 and the adjustments detailed in this addendum will not apply.

6 Similarly, the adaptation to the review method does not preclude providers from opting to request additional members of the review team (see paragraph 131 of the Handbook).

## How to use this addendum

7 The addendum should be read in conjunction with the Handbook, which sets out the method in detail. The addendum is designed to explain where adaptations have been made to the method and provides a supplement to the operation of the review method. The purpose of the addendum is to make clear where the method has been adapted to deliver its objective in terms of quality assurance. These adaptations are summarised in Annex 3. There are no further departures from the normal method apart from what is set out in this document.

## **Aims and objectives of Quality Enhancement Review**

8 The overall aims and objectives of QER in providing assurance that the provider meets UK and EHEA expectations and its objectives in terms of assurance remain unchanged (see paragraphs 9 and 10). The structure of the review around the strategic priorities and context of the provider, and the nature and profile of its student body, are still relevant to the review which focuses on quality assurance that delivers positive outcomes for all students.

9 In streamlining the review to focus on HEFCW's statutory responsibilities, QAA is committed to minimising the burden on higher education providers by responding proportionately to efficient, cost-effective and flexible delivery of the method. Adjustments to the delivery of the review, not just in the scope of review visits, are detailed in the sections that follow.

10 HEFCW will continue to maintain a focus on quality enhancement within the Quality Assessment Framework and wishes to ensure that this focus continues as part of the regular discussions between QAA and providers. While QAA will continue to engage regularly with providers in relation to quality enhancement, there is no expectation that this work will result in published reports, outcomes or judgements. Providers will be able to demonstrate a continued involvement with QAA's enhancement activities, which are detailed in Section 2.

11 Evidence-based, critical self-evaluation is a central element of QAA's review methods. It enables the provider to demonstrate a reflective quality culture that evaluates and builds on its strengths, and identifies and addresses potential risks to quality or academic standards. It is central to explaining the institution's approach to assuring academic standards and quality of provision, and to explaining how the requirements of the ESG and UK Quality Code for Higher Education are met. There is scope within this adapted approach to combine and integrate elements of the information base for the review in order to minimise burden of review preparation on providers and to effectively demonstrate to the review team the requirements for the judgements are met (see Section 3).

## Section 1: External reference points and scope of Quality Enhancement Review

12 While providers have flexibility in identifying the full suite of reference points that are relevant to their context (see paragraph 21 of the Handbook), the key reference points against which providers are reviewed in Wales, the relevant baseline requirements, are specified by HEFCW in the [External Quality Assurance Review](#) document. These baseline requirements still apply: namely, the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (England, Wales and Northern Ireland), the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales, the Expectations and Core and Common Practices of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, in relation to both English and Welsh medium provision of the institution. The Common practices play a central role in underpinning quality in all UK providers and form part of the regulatory requirements in Wales. Common practices will, therefore, still apply for the purposes of the adapted review method for 2021-22 with its focus on quality assurance.

## Section 2: Enhancement in Quality Enhancement Review

13 QAA continues to promote and support quality enhancement in Wales through its work with its members and the sector. Enhancement forms part of QAA's regular engagement and discussions with providers through a number of mechanisms, including liaison meetings, the promotion, sharing and showcasing of good practice through the Wales Quality Network, and the recently introduced collaborative enhancement projects initiative. QAA will be directing resources from the quality enhancement element of QER into the collaborative enhancement projects in 2021-22, providing providers the opportunity to demonstrate their engagement with quality enhancement over the period of their review. These projects are aimed at promoting collaboration and sector development through groups of providers working together on a particular topic that has the potential to enhance practice in the sector for the benefit of students. Further details can be found on the [QAA website](#). QAA encourages and promotes student engagement in these projects.

14 Providers in Wales have a strong focus on national priorities such as civic mission, student wellbeing and sustainability. **These initiatives would normally form the basis for discussion in relation to quality enhancement and will not be included in the scope of reviews in 2021-22 unless at the expressed wish of the provider.**

15 Effective student engagement applies to both quality assurance and enhancement processes. While student engagement may take on more involved forms and participation for quality enhancement, for students to contribute to the quality assurance process, student engagement still needs to capture the full diversity of students and scope of the provider's provision, irrespective of location, mode of delivery and level of study. Student participation continues as one of the key components of QER for reviews in 2021-22, both in terms of the review team (all review teams will have a student reviewer) and the role of students at the provider (see Section 3).

## Section 3: Quality Enhancement Review method

### Areas of focus

16 QER has previously offered providers the opportunity for the review to focus on the areas of most benefit and strategic importance to them. These areas of focus are intended to demonstrate the provider's approach to the management and enhancement of its provision in areas relating to the enhancement of the student learning experience and in support of learning and teaching. As these are normally areas supporting enhancement, **for QERs taking place in 2021-22, providers are not required to identify and evaluate areas of focus for their review.**

## Key participants in the review

17 The roles of the QAA Officer, students (normally through a Lead Student Representative) and the institution's staff facilitator, remain unchanged for reviews in 2021-22. Student reviewers continue as full and equal members of review teams. The student representative body will have, as before, a key role by supporting students' engagement in the review and are invited to nominate a Lead Student Representative (LSR). Students may input to the process through a number of ways, which remain unchanged (see paragraph 59 of the Handbook). QAA provides advice and guidance for LSRs at the Provider Briefing and Preparatory Meeting ahead of the review. Student representatives and/or the LSR are welcome to contact their QAA Officer outside these meetings for advice on adjustments being made to the method for 2021-22 so that they have a clear understanding of the process.

## The information base for the review

18 Recognising the substantial additional workload as a result of COVID-19, providers are encouraged to focus their review preparation to minimise the burden of over-preparation. This includes giving consideration to how to scale down self-evaluation documents, as appropriate, by ensuring the focus is on business as usual through an evidence base of key documents that confirms the effectiveness of the provider's approach to meeting the relevant regulatory requirements and expectations of the ESG Part 1.

19 The QER method has been designed to acknowledge that regulated providers already have a demonstrable track record (two or more successful QAA reviews) in meeting the requirements of the UK Quality Code by allowing providers to confirm the continuing strength of their practices. As such, the method represents a significant shift and change from previous methods by seeking to confirm rather than re-test baseline requirements. Reviewers will seek to explore the range and overall effectiveness of the provider's ongoing and routine evaluative activities wherever possible.

20 The Change Report (or mapping document) is a key component of this approach whereby the provider summarises what has changed since its previous review and provides evidence of the effectiveness of change. The Change Report enables providers to outline changes in how they meet or have responded to the relevant baseline regulatory requirements and other external reference points (more particularly, the ESG). The Change Report should be accompanied by evidence of the rationale behind changes and how the provider has evaluated, or plans to evaluate, the effectiveness of changes.

21 QER focuses on the provider's own critical assessment of its strengths, potential risks identified for quality and standards, and areas to be addressed and developed. Consequently, the method places particular importance on evidence-based evaluation and critical self-evaluation, and allows reviewers to confirm, rather than re-test, that the provider meets the requirements and/or standards of the judgement areas. **While the method places emphasis on self-evaluation and change reporting, the format of how providers present these elements, for instance, combining the Change Report with self-evaluation, is a judgement for the provider.** This is in recognition that **the Self-evaluative Analysis no longer needs to address two headings of the Technical Report - 'Enhancing the student learning experience' and 'Supporting the enhancement of learning and teaching'**. Common practices of the UK Quality Code, which relate to practices underpinning improvement and enhancement, are relevant to the 'Academic standards and quality processes' heading of the Technical Report which comments on the effectiveness of how approaches to quality are used to enhance learning and teaching.

22 As before, providers should be mindful of the requirement to ensure both judgement areas are adequately covered in their analysis and the evidence-base they provide. Annex 6 of the Handbook provides advice on the content of the Self-evaluative Analysis. While those elements relating to enhancement do not need to be included, contextual information and use of data in the management of standards and quality are as applicable to the adapted QER process as before. Providers are welcome to discuss their plans for structuring their evidence base with QAA.

## Student contribution

23 QAA is fully committed to encouraging and enabling active student participation and engagement in QERs. Annex 5 of the Handbook, Student engagement and involvement, still applies to reviews in 2021-22. Information provided by students in advance, normally through a written student submission, is regarded as a fundamental part of the process as the submission provides insight into the nature of the student experience and effectiveness of the provider's management of quality of the student experience. QAA review teams will expect to meet a diverse range of students, who represent the make-up of the student body. Meetings with student representatives may provide a targeted opportunity to hear a diverse student voice, while also allowing good use of students' time. Review teams will, however, also want to hear from students who are not representatives.

24 For reviews in 2021-22, student submissions will continue to focus on what it is like to be a student at the provider under review and how students are engaged individually and collectively in the development, assurance and enhancement of the quality of their education experience.

25 **Student submissions can be made in alternative formats, as well as using other formats to support a main written submission.** Further [guidance on alternative formats](#) is available. Student representatives can ask for more advice at the provider briefing and preparatory meeting on any aspects of the process and their involvement. Further written guidance for student representatives is being prepared and will be available after the Provider Briefing.

## The review process

26 QAA will hold a collective, online Provider Briefing. The briefing will be used to explain and discuss the adapted method and provide advice on the review process. As before, the Preparatory Meeting will typically take place for the provider at six months before the Review Visit.

27 The First Team Visit (FTV) is currently used in part to clarify and confirm outstanding matters in relation to quality assurance so to allow greater focus on the enhancement elements of the review. Furthermore, the Visit is structured around meetings with members of staff and students, meetings that are held as part of the main Review Visit. With this in mind, **QAA has decided not to conduct First Team Visits for reviews in 2021-22.** Instead, review teams will hold a private first team meeting which will be used to agree the duration of the Review Visit, the draft programme and any additional information requests. This meeting will take place at the same point in the review process as the FTV, and the outcomes of the meeting communicated to the provider immediately after the meeting.

28 The length of the Review Visit will be adapted to take account of the reduced scope of the review. **For higher education providers, the visit will last between two and four days depending on the size and complexity of the provision, and the nature of the themes identified by the team. For further education providers where there is more**

**limited scope to reduce the size of the review team (review teams will always include a student reviewer), a two-day visit will normally take place.**

29 At the Review Visit, reviewers will always meet with members of the students' union and its representatives and students with involvement in quality assurance. Review Teams will ensure they take account of the diversity of the student population by meeting with a range of students across the provider, as appropriate.

30 **Meetings with the head of the provider, employers, governors and alumni are optional and may be put forward by the provider.**

## **Section 4: Judgements and findings**

31 For reviews taking place in 2021-22, there are no changes in terms of the review judgements (see paragraphs 106-110 of the Handbook). **The Review Team will not make a statement on the provider's approach to enhancement.** The other types of findings of the review - affirmations, recommendations, and commendations - will still apply to reviews. Review teams will continue to identify features of good practice as commendations, recognising those practices that make particularly positive contributions to the student learning experience within the context of the provider.

32 Review teams make their judgements based on the criteria contained in Annex 2 of the Handbook. One criterion is the effectiveness of the provider's approach to enhancement. This has been modified to take account of the Common practices of the UK Quality Code for both standards and quality, which is the effectiveness of the provider's practices to drive improvement and enhancement. The updated judgement criteria can be found in Annex B of this addendum.

## **Section 5: Reporting, action plans and follow-up**

33 The processes for reporting, action planning and follow-up remain unchanged. Providers with a judgement of 'meets requirements' in both judgement areas will still qualify to use the QAA Quality Mark.

## **Section 6: Review team**

34 As the scope of the review has been reduced to focus on quality assurance, **review teams will comprise of three reviewers.** There will always be a student reviewer who is a current or recent student. The composition of the review team will include a member of staff with knowledge and experience of the Welsh higher education sector and member of academic staff at another provider in the UK.

35 Reviewers will undertake refresher training to ensure they understand the adaptations made to the review method for 2021-22.

## Annex A: Content of the Technical Report

Technical Reports for reviews taking place in 2021-22 will be structured around the following headings:

### **Contextual information about the provider, student population and the review**

- Summary information about the provider, including strategic framework, organisational structure.
- Composition, key trends and anticipated changes in the student population, including information on retention, progression and outcomes.
- Commentary on the preparation for the review, including how the provider and students worked in partnership in review preparation.
- Summary of the provider's follow-up to the previous review.
- Where relevant, details of the provider's responsibilities for the higher education it provides on behalf of the degree-awarding body/ies it works with.

### **Academic standards and quality processes**

- Key features of the provider's approach to managing quality, how students are involved in contributing to the management of the quality of learning.
- Key features of the approach to setting, maintaining, reviewing and assessing academic standards.
- Use of external reference points in quality processes.
- Commentary on action taken since the previous review and identification of matters arising from the Change Report and Prior Information Pack not otherwise explored.
- Approach to using data to inform decision-making and evaluation.
- **Effectiveness of how approaches to quality are used to improve and enhance learning and teaching.**
- Effectiveness of the arrangements for securing academic standards.
- Effectiveness of the approach to self-evaluation, including the effective use of data to inform decision-making.

### **Collaborative provision (if applicable)**

- Key features of the provider's strategic approach (to include collaborative activity, online and distance learning where delivered with others and work-based learning).
- Information on the extent and nature of collaborative provision and plans for change.
- **Effectiveness of the approach to managing collaborative provision including arrangements for securing academic standards and improvement and enhancement of student academic experience.**

## Annex B: Judgements

### Judgement criteria

The criteria that review teams use to come to their judgements are set out below.

...meets requirements	...meets requirements with conditions	...does not meet requirements
<p>All, or nearly all, applicable requirements and/or standards have been met.</p>	<p>Most applicable requirements and/or standards have been met.</p>	<p>Several applicable requirements and/or standards have not been met or there are major gaps in one or more of the applicable expectations.</p>
<p>Requirements and/or standards not met do not, individually or collectively, present any serious risks to the management of standards or quality.</p> <p>Recommendations may relate, for example, to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• minor omissions or oversights</li> <li>• a need to amend or update approaches that will not result in major structural, operational or procedural change</li> <li>• completion of activity that is already underway in a small number of areas that will allow the provider to meet requirements more fully</li> <li>• <b>the provider's practices to drive improvement and enhancement.</b></li> </ul> <p>In exceptional cases there could be a differentiated judgement identifying one area of significant concern needing priority action within an identified timescale.</p>	<p>Requirements and/or standards not met do not present any serious risks to standards or quality.</p> <p>Some moderate risks may exist that, without action, could lead to serious problems over time with the management of standards or quality.</p> <p>Recommendations may relate to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• shortcomings in the provider's approach to requirements and/or standards</li> <li>• insufficient emphasis or priority given to assuring standards or quality</li> <li>• quality assurance procedures that, while broadly adequate, have some shortcomings in terms of the rigour with which they are applied</li> <li>• <b>under-development of practices to drive improvement and enhancement</b></li> <li>• problems that are confined to a small part of the provision.</li> </ul>	<p>Requirements and/or standards not met present serious risk(s), individually or collectively, to the management of standards or quality. The controls in place to mitigate the risk are inadequate. Consequences of inaction/insufficiently timely action in some areas may be severe.</p> <p>Recommendations may relate to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ineffective approach to requirements and/or standards</li> <li>• significant gaps in policy, structures or procedures relating to the provider's assurance of quality or standards</li> <li>• <b>ineffective practices to drive improvement and enhancement</b></li> <li>• breaches by the provider of its own quality assurance procedures.</li> </ul>

...meets requirements	...meets requirements with conditions	...does not meet requirements
<p>There are examples of good practice, some of which will likely be identified as commendations.</p> <p>Student engagement is supported.</p> <p>Managing the needs of its students is a clear focus of the provider's strategies and policies.</p> <p>Processes help identify areas for development with the provider acknowledging the need for action in its review documentation or during the review.</p> <p>Evidence of appropriate action routinely being taken within a reasonable timescale, including in response to previous reviews.</p> <p>There is evidence that the provider is fully aware of its responsibilities for assuring quality and standards and alert to indicators that could signal when problems might develop.</p>	<p>Plans that the provider presents for addressing identified problems before or at the review may be underdeveloped or not fully embedded.</p> <p>Actions may not be appropriately prioritised with the risk that issues become more systematic or serious.</p> <p>The provider's priorities or recent actions suggest that it may not be fully aware of the significance of certain issues.</p>	<p>Plans for addressing identified problems that the provider may present before or at the review are not adequate to rectify the problems, or there is very little or no evidence of effective progress.</p> <p>The provider may have not recognised that it has major problems, or has not planned appropriate action to address problems it has identified.</p> <p>The provider has limited understanding of the responsibilities associated with one or more key areas of the requirements and/or standards or may not be fully in control of all parts of the organisation.</p> <p>The provider may repeatedly or persistently fail to take appropriate action in response to external review activities.</p>

## Annex C: Summary of adaptations to Quality Enhancement Review for reviews taking place in 2021-22

Subject	Adaptation
Areas of focus	There is no requirement for these (paragraph 16).
First Team Visit	There will be no First Team Visits. Instead, review teams will hold a first team meeting in private to decide on duration of the review, to draft the review programme and decide on any additional information requests (paragraph 27).
Judgement criteria and outcomes	<p>The criteria have been revised to take more specific account of the Common practices relating to practices driving improvement and enhancement. A revised table is presented in this guidance document and changes highlighted in bold (Annex B and paragraph 32).</p> <p>The review team will not make a statement on the provider's approach to enhancement (paragraph 31).</p>
National priorities	National priorities are not included in reviews (paragraph 14).
Provider's information base	The three components of the information base (self-evaluation, change reporting and prior information pack) still apply, however, providers can adapt how they present these elements in order to best meet their needs and to minimise the burden of review preparation (paragraph 21).
Review visit	<p>Meetings with head of provider, employers, governors and alumni are optional and may be put forward by the provider (paragraph 30).</p> <p>The length of the review visit will be adapted to take account of the reduced scope of the review. For further education providers, a two-day visit will normally take place (paragraph 28).</p>
Review team	As the scope of the review has been reduced to focus on quality assurance, review teams will comprise three reviewers including a student reviewer (paragraph 34).
Scope	Review teams will not report against the Technical Report headings concerned with enhancement: 'Enhancing the student learning experience' and 'Supporting the enhancement of learning and teaching' (paragraph 21 and Annex A).
Student submission	<p>The focus of the submission in relation to quality enhancement should relate specifically to the Common practices of the UK Quality Code and the use made of individual and collective student engagement processes to drive improvement and enhancement (paragraph 24).</p> <p>Student submissions can be made in alternative formats to the written submission (paragraph 25).</p>
Technical Report	Revised report headings are presented in Annex A. Where subheadings have been revised, these are highlighted in bold.

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