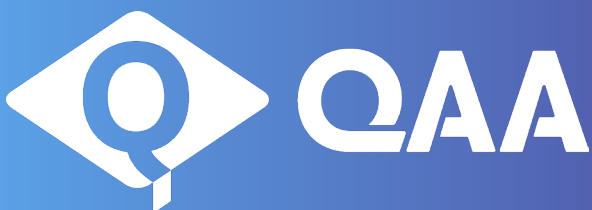




The UK Transnational Education Quality Scheme



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Introducing the UK TNE Quality Scheme

The [UK TNE Quality Scheme](#) is a programme of quality enhancement activity focusing on transnational partnerships and arrangements. The Scheme is non-regulatory, acting as a UK-wide mechanism to support practice over and above the regulatory baseline by focusing on quality enhancement, enabling providers to deliver effective, high-quality transnational education (TNE) provision.

In the context of the UK TNE Quality Scheme, TNE refers to education delivered by UK higher education providers in a country/territory, or to students, other than where the awarding provider is based.

QAA defines enhancement as:

'Taking deliberate steps to bring about improvement in the effectiveness of the learning experiences of students.'

The Scheme is open to all UK higher education providers – from those at the start of their TNE journey to those with significant experience.

Through reports, insights, resources, and training, the Scheme supports UK providers to:

- Enhance the quality of their TNE provision and TNE student experience
- Navigate country contexts
- Develop sustainable high-quality global partnerships.

The UK TNE Quality Scheme is the successor to the [Quality Evaluation and Enhancement of UK TNE \(QE-TNE\) Scheme](#), which was first commissioned by Universities UK (UUK) and Guild HE in 2020.

Following the successful first iteration of the QE-TNE Scheme, the three representative bodies of the UK's higher education sector, UUK, GuildHE, and Independent HE (IHE), have formally commissioned QAA to continue the delivery of the UK TNE Scheme.

The Scheme is supported by MillionPlus and University Alliance, who will work with QAA and their members to promote engagement in the Scheme.

The Scheme is officially supported by the Department for Education in England, and endorsed by the Scottish Funding Council as well as by the Department for the Economy Northern Ireland and Medr in Wales who encourage their higher education providers engaged in TNE to participate in the Scheme.

Context and background

QAA has run the QE-TNE Scheme since 2021. It was commissioned for an initial five-year period, culminating at the end of the 2025-26 academic year. With this first iteration coming to a close, QAA has taken the opportunity to refresh and evolve the Scheme, designing the UK TNE Quality Scheme which starts in the 2026-27 academic year.

The updated Scheme is designed to ensure maximum value to UK universities, respond to the growth of TNE and its potential risks, and build domestic and international trust in the quality of UK TNE.

The growth of UK TNE in recent years has been substantial. Since 2019-20, there has been a 55% increase in the number of UK HE TNE students. As of 2024-25 data, 184 UK providers deliver TNE in 233 countries and territories. If current trends continue, TNE students will soon outnumber the number of international students studying in the UK.

This expansion is also being driven by the UK Government's International Education Strategy, published in January 2026. The strategy foregrounds the importance of UK TNE and sets an ambitious target of growing education exports to £40 billion per year by 2030.

As UK TNE continues to grow, its long-term success depends on maintaining high-quality provision. Visible, UK-wide sector-led action to safeguard and enhance the quality of UK TNE has never been more important.



Scope and coverage

Membership to the UK TNE Quality Scheme is available on an annual basis and is open to all UK higher education providers.

It encompasses:

- All UK higher education provision delivered outside the UK leading to UK awards at Levels 4-8 of The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ) and Levels 7-12 of The Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland (FQHEIS).
- All forms of transnational partnership and delivery including branch campuses, joint and dual awards, franchised and validated provision, and distance and flexible learning.

The UK TNE Quality Scheme is entirely separate from QAA's external quality assurance (EQA) review methods and any quality assurance issues arising would be referred to the substantive cyclical review method as appropriate.

The UK TNE Quality Scheme is a paid-for service and is independent of QAA membership. Providers do not have to be a member of QAA to be a member of the Scheme.

Providers who are members of QAA also have the option to be part of the Global Insights package. Global Insights spans key international themes, including international strategy, student mobility, internationalisation of the curriculum, and international student support – and provides wide-angle country reports and global policy insight to help build understanding of the broader international landscape. In comparison, the UK TNE Quality Scheme focuses specifically on transnational education, drawing on live TNE partnerships and arrangements, to provide sector-led peer learning alongside tailored QAA training and guidance. [Find out more about QAA membership options on the QAA website.](#)

[Full terms and conditions of the UK TNE Quality Scheme are available here.](#)

Vision, purposes, and principles

The vision of the UK TNE Quality Scheme is to maintain and strengthen UK transnational higher education's worldwide recognition as providing education of the highest quality, an outstanding student experience, added value and enhanced outcomes.

The **four core purposes** of the Scheme are:



The Scheme is underpinned by the following principles:

- UK-wide
- Applicable to all UK HE providers engaged in TNE
- Valid for all types of TNE
- Cost-efficient
- Flexible and responsive
- Minimises burden and avoid duplication
- Student experience at its heart
- Supports peer learning and sector sharing
- Retains international trust and maintains reputation
- Is enhancement led
- Is thematically focused

Overview of UK TNE Quality Scheme

The Scheme is an annual programme of activity, designed to support providers at all levels in developing and enhancing their TNE provision. Each year, the activity is shaped around a broad central theme that highlights a key feature of an effective TNE arrangement. For example, the first year of the Scheme looks at the theme of 'contextualisation'.

The Scheme's activity is formed of **three main pillars**:

Enhance



Improve your practice

This pillar focuses on enhancement-led insights that help members reflect on their TNE arrangements and continuously strengthen provision.

- Up to 8 thematically focused Partnership Insights: insights at TNE arrangement level to support enhancement, with published reports to share effective practice and areas for enhancement across the sector

Advise



Support your delivery

This pillar provides a wide range of resources and guidance to help members enhance the TNE student experience and navigate different contexts.

- Up to 5 case studies written by providers on the annual theme: to share practice and approaches on specific topics
- 3 thematic insights written by QAA: analysing patterns, trends, challenges, and effective practice drawn from Partnership Insights and case studies, providing guidance and reflective questions
- 3 country regulation digests: offering short briefings that provide details on the local regulatory context
- An annual, in-person TNE symposium: providing a practical forum for sharing practice and supporting peer learning

Develop



Upskill your staff

This pillar offers training programmes for staff at different experience levels to develop their TNE expertise.

- 6 annual training sessions: professional development for institutional staff to support with the effective development, delivery and management of TNE arrangements

Further detail about each pillar of the Scheme is provided on the next page.



Enhance: Improve your practice

Guidance on Partnership Insights

Overview

Partnership Insights focus on specific TNE arrangements and how these have been enhanced. They are an opportunity for UK providers to showcase how selected TNE arrangements work in practice, and give providers the chance to receive external feedback on their TNE arrangement from a peer team acting as a critical friend.

They are non-regulatory and do not involve judgements. Instead, they focus on effective practice and suggestions for enhancement within the TNE arrangement.

All Partnership Insight exercises take place online. The approach is self-evaluative, inclusive, collaborative, and enhancement-led, with the focus shaped around the theme selected for that year.

Based around a short self-evaluation document (SED) developed by the provider and supported by documentation, the team carries out desk-based analysis of the documentation, leading to a series of online meetings with staff working in the arrangement (senior, academic and support), and students.

The focus of the SED and the meetings is on:

- The effectiveness of the working arrangement (governance, operational management, staff support and development, communication)
- Consideration of the student learning experience (teaching and learning, student support, working in partnership with students, employability, student diversity)
- Approach to comparability in the student learning experience (approach to the equivalence of outcomes and use of data).

After this process, the team develops a report that highlights:

- Areas of effective practice and potential areas for enhancement
- Contextual information about the UK provider and its strategy
- Summary information on the specific arrangement and programmes selected, country context, and understanding of local regulations
- Commentary on the effectiveness of the working arrangement
- Consideration of the student learning experience
- Approach to comparability in the student learning experience.

The draft report is shared with the provider to enable them to review it before a final version is developed and signed off. The resulting reports will be published on the Membership Resources Area of the QAA website (only accessible to Scheme members) to support peer learning and the wider enhancement of practice across Scheme members. Insights gathered from across Partnership Insights also inform Thematic Insight reports, giving providers a broader view of emerging trends, patterns, and comparative analysis.

In addition to the focus on the annual theme, there is an opportunity for the provider and its partner to highlight particular areas of good practice or learning and enhancement. There is also an option to involve in-country stakeholders as observers to give confidence in provision and provide local insight.

Detailed guidance for providers taking part in a Partnership Insight will be provided.

How participants will be identified to invite them to participate

At the start of each academic year, QAA will identify a range of possible Scheme members to participate in Partnership Insights. The Scheme aims to undertake up to eight Partnership Insights each year.

To identify a balanced and representative set of providers, QAA uses the HESA Aggregate Offshore Record data to provide an overview of what provision is being delivered and where, alongside other factors. The aim is a set of up to eight Partnership Insights that cover a breadth of partnership types and contexts. Considerations include:

- **Maturity of TNE provision** – including both newer and long-established arrangements.
- **Location of provision** – ensuring a geographical spread of countries, with attention to priority markets and areas with recent regulatory developments.
- **Type of provision** – covering the full range of TNE models, from distance learning to collaborative provision to branch campuses.
- **Change in student numbers** – including arrangements that have experienced significant changes in student numbers over recent years.
- **Nation of the UK provider** – ensuring fair and proportionate representation across the four nations, while avoiding undue burden (for example, Northern Ireland may not appear every year due to the size of the sector).
- **Recentness of last participation in Partnership Insights** – ensuring the same provider is not invited to participate in Partnership Insights in consecutive years.
- **Institutional review timing** – ensuring providers are not invited in the same year as their QAA institutional review, where applicable.
- **Size and type of institution** – ensuring fair representation in the selection across different size and types of providers, from small and specialist to large and research-intensive.
- **Volunteers** – providers may express interest in participating.

For example, QAA may invite an English provider delivering a joint degree programme in India that has doubled its enrolment over the past three years. Rapid growth raises important considerations about student experience, and India is a priority country for the UK sector. Understanding how a provider is operating successfully in this context would offer valuable learning both for the provider, and for the sector.

In the same selection round, QAA may also identify a Welsh provider that has not participated in a Partnership Insight for a few years, to explore their franchise arrangement in Viet Nam. This supports representation from another UK nation, brings in a different model of provision, and focuses on a country that has recently introduced new regulatory requirements.

QAA will share a proposed list of Scheme members to participate in each year's Partnership Insight activity at the UK TNE Quality Scheme Advisory Group's autumn meeting. The Advisory Group will have the opportunity to comment on issues that might affect final selection, such as institutional capacity or sector specific considerations.

QAA will then email the proposed Scheme members to invite them to participate in a Partnership Insight. An initial meeting will be arranged to discuss the process, and detailed guidance will be provided.

Providers will not be selected for more than one Partnership Insight per year, in consecutive years, or in the same year as their substantive review (where applicable).

As the Scheme is voluntary and enhancement-led, providers may decline to participate in a Partnership Insight for any reason, including capacity or resource constraints. Doing so will have no negative impact on their future selection.

In addition, all activity will be scheduled collaboratively at a time that is best suited for the provider and their partner.

There is also an opportunity for providers to volunteer to participate in a Partnership Insight.

Guidance on relationship between Partnership Insights and regulatory review activity

QAA's review methods in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland are regulatory institutional-level reviews that include oversight of TNE by evaluating how institutions manage their TNE arrangements. During these regular institutional-level reviews, review teams are able to highlight particular lines of enquiry arising from the evidence base around any of an institution's individual TNE partnerships to be explored, but tend not to routinely be the focus of every institutional review.

The Partnership Insights offered by the Scheme are designed to complement these review methods by providing insights at the level of individual TNE arrangements. This supports enhancement by using insights from within specific partnerships to enable thematic activity that informs practice across arrangements and the wider sector.

Partnership Insights reflect on how the TNE arrangement and its processes have developed to support enhancement of the partnership, student experience and outcomes. They are thematic and do not constitute an assessment against the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

Should any quality assurance related issue or query be identified by the peer team during the Partnership Insight process, it will be referred directly to the QAA Scotland, Wales, or Northern Ireland teams as relevant, to be addressed through the substantive institutional review or follow up processes. The institution's Institutional Liaison Manager will arrange an initial meeting with the provider in the first instance to discuss the issue and the next steps as appropriate.

Any significant concerns related to TNE found during the Partnership Insight process may be referred at any point, by any party, to QAA for investigation through each of the nation's regulatory arrangements (e.g. via a concerns scheme), or via a notification to the Office for Students in England.





Advise: Support your delivery

Guidance, resources, and events

The UK TNE Quality Scheme provides a wide range of resources and guidance to help providers enhance the TNE student experience and navigate in-country regulations.

Case studies

Case studies are selected using the same considerations applied to Partnership Insights, as outlined above. Participation in a case study is voluntary, and providers can decline for any reason. Proposed providers are invited by email in the autumn term to participate. Up to five selections will be made, and providers can also volunteer to participate in a case study.

Case studies are developed by providers, with the specific topic agreed jointly between the provider and the QAA. Agreed topics will benefit and interest the wider sector – highlighting challenges encountered, lessons learned, and examples of effective practice and innovative practice. Each case study topic will align with the Scheme's annual theme, while allowing flexibility to reflect the provider's context and experience.

Case studies are typically a few pages in length. Although they present institutional practice, they are published by QAA to QAA's style guidelines but can include institutional logos, where agreed. QAA will edit and format for consistency and the draft will be shared with the provider to review and approve prior to publication.

Thematic Insights and analysis reports

Drawing on findings from Partnership Insights, and the practice presented in case studies, QAA will produce cross-cutting thematic insights that identify common patterns, trends, practice, and challenges across TNE arrangements and country contexts.

These reports offer practical guidance, reflective questions, and examples to support enhancement – whether an institution is new to TNE or has extensive experience.

Thematic outputs are supported by webinars and practice-sharing sessions, giving Scheme members opportunities to discuss findings, ask questions, and explore how the insights can be applied in their own contexts.

Country Regulation digests

Country Regulation digests are short, focused briefings produced in collaboration with overseas quality agencies and regulators. They provide up-to-date guidance on local regulatory requirements and contextual considerations relevant to UK TNE. These digests help providers navigate regulatory environments and maintain confidence in their provision.

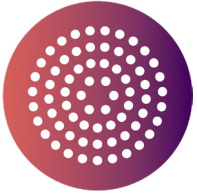
The format of these digests may vary, including webinars and/or written reports. QAA aims to produce three country regulation digests a year.

Annual in-person TNE Symposium

The Scheme hosts an in-person interactive TNE Symposium for members, bringing colleagues together to share practice and expertise, and support peer learning in TNE.

It provides space for discussion and networking, as well as practical sessions giving attendees actionable takeaways to apply to their own TNE practice.





Develop: Upskill your staff

Training

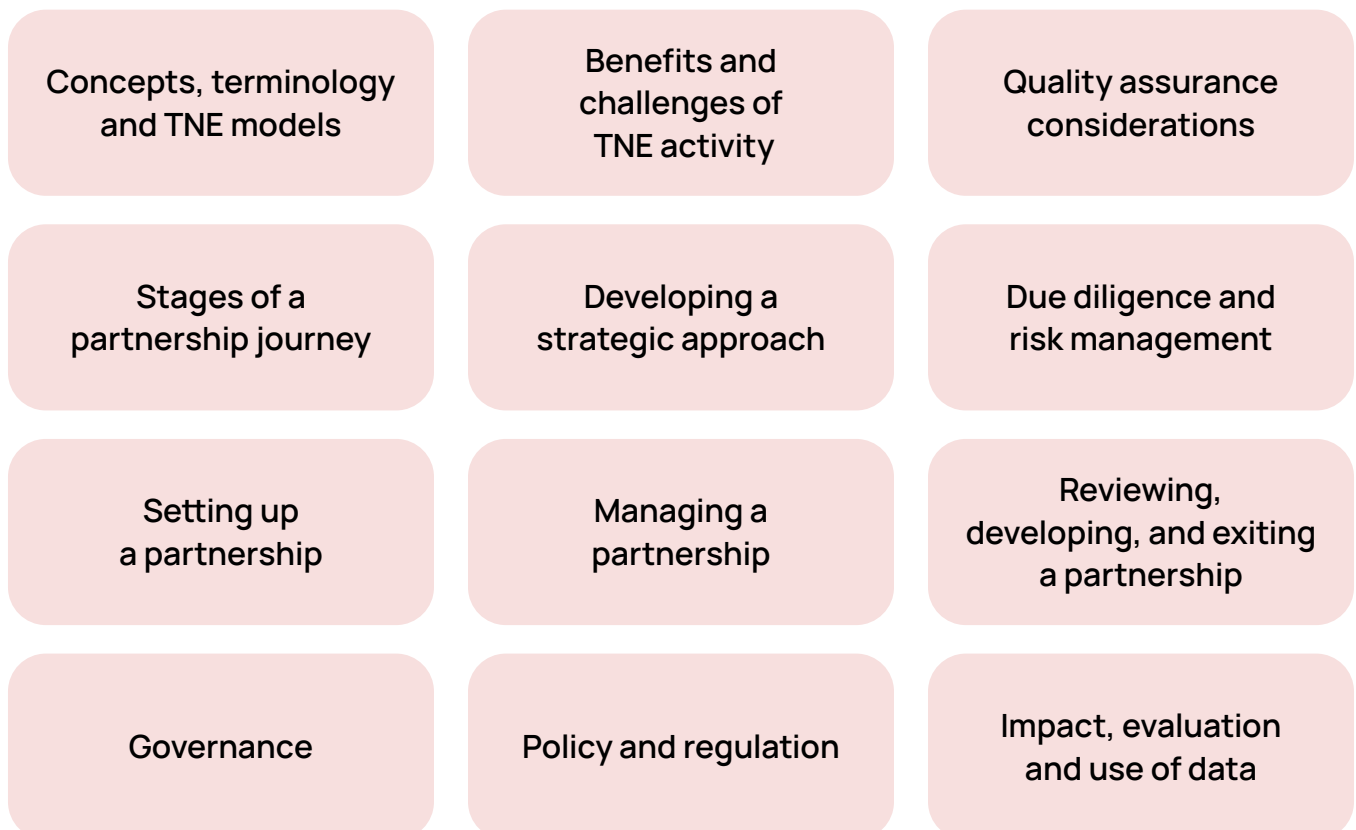
The Scheme offers three training sessions a year, with each session delivered twice to maximise access for Scheme members. The sessions are designed to support staff at different stages of their TNE experience:

- Introduction to TNE – for staff new to TNE arrangements
- TNE in practice – for staff currently working in TNE arrangements
- Enhancing your TNE – for those with significant experience of working in TNE arrangements looking to further develop and enhance their knowledge and institutional approach.




In advance of each training session, Scheme members can register one place per provider in the first instance. Any remaining spaces will then be released to Scheme members on a first-come, first-served basis.

All training sessions are delivered online.

The training programme covers key topics essential for the effective development, management, and delivery of TNE arrangements, including:



Indicative timeline of Scheme activity

Term	 Enhance Improve your practice Partnership Insights	 Advise Support your delivery Guidance, resources, and events	 Develop Upskill your staff Training
Autumn (Sept – Dec)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partnership Insights selection meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Welcome webinar Regulatory digest published/webinar Case study selection meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduction to TNE TNE in practice
Spring (Jan – April)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partnership Insights preparation and activities carried out, reports published 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Case studies developed and published Regulatory digest published/webinar Thematic Insight published 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhancing your TNE Introduction to TNE
Summer (May – July)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partnership Insights preparation and activities carried out, reports published 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Case studies developed and published Regulatory digest published/webinar 2 x Thematic Insights published TNE Symposium Annual report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TNE in practice Enhancing your TNE

Membership benefits

Membership of the UK TNE Quality Scheme gives providers comprehensive and practical support for the effective management, development, and enhancement of TNE provision.

Benefits include:

- **Partnership Insights** that enable a focus on specific TNE arrangements by independent teams, including students.
- **Provider-led case studies** that enable providers to showcase particular areas of practice and share insights with the wider membership.
- **Engagement in thematic activities** that highlight contextualised practice and support enhancement across the sector.
- **Insights into local regulations** to help providers navigate local contexts.
- **Training for staff at all levels**, from those new to TNE to experienced practitioners.
- **Access to a range of resources** to help providers to remain informed about developments in UK TNE.
- **Dedicated resources hub** accessible to anyone with an institutional email address, recognising the breadth of institutional teams involved in TNE.
- **Opportunities for peer learning**, through resources and events.
- **Use of the UK TNE Quality Scheme badge**, enabling providers and their partners to demonstrate their commitment to quality.

Access to resources

Scheme members can access all published reports and resources through the UK TNE Quality Scheme section of the [QAA Membership Resources Area \(MRA\)](#).

- Users must register for access before viewing materials
- All Scheme resources are hosted on the MRA and are not publicly available
- Anyone with an institutional email address can access the resources once registered.

Scheme Badge

Providers participating in the UK TNE Quality Scheme, and their overseas partners, may use the Scheme Badge as a public statement of their commitment to quality in TNE.

The badges must be used in accordance with the [Terms and Conditions](#).

UK TNE Quality Scheme Advisory Group

The UK TNE Quality Scheme Advisory Group will bring together key stakeholders to provide strategic advice, and UK-wide, sector-level perspective to support the effective delivery and ongoing development of the UK TNE Quality Scheme.

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