

QUALITY IN ACTION

A review of our year
2016–17



Our mission

QAA is the independent body entrusted with monitoring and advising on standards and quality in UK higher education. Our mission is to safeguard standards and improve the quality of UK higher education, wherever it is delivered around the world.

Our vision

World-leading and independently assured UK higher education.

Our values

EXPERTISE

- We provide expert advice to the governments of the UK.
- We use our expertise to strengthen quality assurance internationally.
- We use our knowledge and expertise to benefit providers, students and stakeholders.

INNOVATION

- We deliver innovative new approaches, services and valuable events to enhance practice and support providers.
- We are innovatively reviewing our internal systems and processes to deliver cost-effective quality services.

COLLABORATION

- We have a Board that embodies co-regulation, representing broad student, provider and stakeholder interests – collaborating to lead QAA.
- We work with regulators, sector agencies and professional bodies, collaborating for the benefit of the sector.
- We work in collaboration with students and student organisations to engage students and enhance their learning experiences.
- We collaboratively support the distinctive requirements of the UK's home nations.

ACCOUNTABILITY

- We are accountable to our stakeholders through our governance structures.
- We have complaints and appeals processes in place to ensure we are held accountable for our decisions.

INTEGRITY

- We have integrity and, as a registered charity, act in the interests of the public and its beneficiaries.
- We are fair and transparent in our operations, acting with integrity at all times.

Foreword

Good progress in a changing higher education landscape

We have travelled a long way in the last 12 months, with major regulatory and policy developments across the UK including the passing of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 in England, the conclusion of the Quality Enhancement Review in Scotland, and the development of the Quality Assessment Framework for Wales.



As the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 passed through parliament, we were particularly pleased that QAA and the UK's quality assurance system received over 80 positive mentions during debates, including from Minister Jo Johnson:

‘Our HE system is internationally renowned, as Members have commented today. Underpinning this reputation is our internationally recognised system of quality assurance and assessment, which we are updating to meet future needs in an increasingly diverse HE system. The UK Quality Code is central to this quality system and has been for many years.’

Jo Johnson, Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation,
Higher Education and Research Bill, House of Commons Public Bill Committee, 13 Sept 2016

This year also marked the 20th anniversary of our founding. It is a pleasure to see our work continuing to strengthen our sector and the academic experiences of students, as providers respond and improve as a result of critical judgments, or when we find examples of great practice that we can share and celebrate.

I would like to thank our Board for their support and strategic challenge during the 2016-17 year. Thank you also to all those who have supported us and contributed to our work. We look forward to the future.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Douglas Blackstock'. The signature is fluid and cursive.

Douglas Blackstock
Chief Executive

Well positioned for the future

In a changing UK regulatory environment, we need to deliver an innovative system that works for the whole of our diverse sector – universities, colleges and alternative providers. It is vital that we also continue to empower students to shape their own learning experiences.

As we look to the future for the sector, we are ready to play our part. The new QAA strategy, Building on World-Class Quality, sets out how, as the UK's expert independent quality body, we will deliver our vision of world-leading and independently assured UK higher education, ensuring the best possible academic experiences and outcomes for our students.

During the year, we completed an organisational transformation programme to ensure we are lean, responsive and ready to meet the future needs of the sector. We have also continued a review of our governance structure and supporting processes, to ensure the future efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability of our decision making.

I would like to pay tribute to all our staff, led by Douglas Blackstock and his Executive team, for their hard work including the successful delivery of our strategy this year, and their continued dedication and commitment to our organisation.



A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Chris Banks'.

Christopher Banks CBE
Chair of the Board of Directors

Highlights of our year

At a glance

20th

ANNIVERSARY OF
QAA'S FOUNDING

LAUNCH OF OUR NEW
STRATEGY, **BUILDING ON
WORLD-CLASS QUALITY**

30

QUALITY REVIEW
VISITS

299

PROVIDERS FROM ACROSS THE
UK ASSESSED FOR YEAR 2 OF THE
TEACHING EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK

156

REVIEWS AND ANNUAL
MONITORING VISITS OF
ALTERNATIVE PROVIDERS

3

UPDATED HANDBOOKS PUBLISHED
FOR DEGREE AWARDING POWERS IN
ENGLAND, SCOTLAND AND WALES

AROUND 90

STUDENT REVIEWERS ACTIVELY
INVOLVED IN QAA REVIEWS

OVER 500

PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS
ATTENDED OUR ACCESS TO HE
ADMISSIONS FAIR

5

UNSATISFACTORY QUALITY AND
3 FULL CONCERNS SCHEME
INVESTIGATIONS

8

QUALITY ENHANCEMENT NETWORK
EVENTS IN ENGLAND, SCOTLAND
AND WALES ATTENDED BY OVER
300 DELEGATES

500

DELEGATES FROM 17 COUNTRIES
ATTENDED THE THIRD
INTERNATIONAL ENHANCEMENT
CONFERENCE IN GLASGOW

80

POSITIVE MENTIONS OF QAA AND UK QUALITY ASSURANCE IN PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES ON THE HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH BILL

Aims and achievements

This section highlights our achievements against the aims and objectives we set ourselves for 2016-17, in the final year of our 2014-17 strategy. We measure delivery against our strategy at a number of levels, including: detailed termly monitoring of performance against our annual plans; oversight by senior internal committees and our Board; and publication of annual reports.



We will enhance the quality and secure the academic standards of UK higher education, wherever delivered, in order to maintain public confidence

Teaching Excellence Framework

The Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) aims to recognise and reward excellence in teaching and learning, and help to inform prospective students' choices for higher education. We have made a significant contribution to the government's development of the TEF from its early stages. This year, we have worked closely with HEFCE to manage the assessment process for TEF Year 2, in which 299 providers of higher education chose to participate. This included provider briefings around the UK, and training around 100 TEF assessors and panellists.

England and Northern Ireland

Since 1 August 2016, we have delivered significant elements of the funding bodies' revised model for quality assessment in England and Northern Ireland, and transnational education review and strategic international activities for the whole of the UK sector.

We reviewed 30 providers for Year 1 of the new Quality Review Visit, part of the Gateway process for higher education in England and Northern Ireland.

In preparation for the reviews, we undertook a sector-wide consultation on the new method, developed the handbook and supporting materials, and worked with sector partners to train 92 reviewers (including 25 student reviewers).



Scotland

In 2016, we were commissioned by the Scottish Funding Council to develop the new method of review, in-line with the Quality Enhancement Framework in Scotland. The new handbook for Enhancement-led Institutional Review was published in April 2017 and the first reviews will take place in 2017-18.

In summer 2017, the Enhancement Theme on Student Transitions concluded successfully, with a range of resources available for future use. We will deliver the new Enhancement Theme (Evidence for Enhancement) in Scotland for 2017-20, with a parallel programme across the rest of the UK, to ensure that good practice is disseminated.

Wales

In Wales, we completed a six-year programme of reviews and, in May 2017, we were delighted when Universities Wales announced that we would be the single independent external quality reviewer on behalf of all universities in Wales to 2023. We have worked closely with the sector to develop Quality Enhancement Review to align with the Quality Assessment Framework in Wales, ensuring we comply with Welsh standards and expectations, including for the Welsh language.

Transnational education reviews and international engagement

UK transnational education (TNE) is UK higher education delivered overseas. This year, on behalf of the whole UK sector, we developed a revised method for TNE review and published the new review handbook. We also announced a three-year programme for TNE reviews: Ireland (2017), Hong Kong (2018) and Malaysia (2019).

This work maintains the confidence and trust of international governments and regulators, and underpins the UK's global reputation for providing world-class higher education.

We continued to deepen our strategic relationships to support UK higher education internationally. We have 15 formal agreements with partners around the world and a number of letters of intent to develop agreements in other countries.

We also launched two new international publication series – Country Reports and International Insights – which deliver valuable intelligence to UK providers on the regulatory and higher education landscapes in key countries and regions for UK TNE.

Unsatisfactory Quality Scheme Investigations and the Concerns Scheme

These schemes are important safeguards to address weaknesses in the management of UK academic quality and standards. During 2016–17, we completed:

- **five Unsatisfactory Quality Scheme Investigations** (this scheme covers England and Northern Ireland)
- **eight Concerns Scheme initial inquiries**, of which three progressed to full investigations (this scheme covers Wales and all UK alternative providers)
- **five Scottish Concerns Scheme initial inquiries**, of which none progressed further.

Alternative provider programmes

We review alternative providers (independent providers not in receipt of direct recurrent public funding) of higher education across the UK on behalf of the Home Office and Department for Education. We undertook 156 reviews (including annual monitoring) during the year.

Our work continues to have a significant positive effect, recognising and supporting high quality alternative provision, while safeguarding the interests of students and the reputation of the sector from those providers that do not meet UK expectations.

We also held two Alternative Provider Liaison Forums during the year and an Annual Alternative Provider Conference, attended by 120 delegates.

Degree awarding powers and university title

Since our foundation in 1997, we have provided expert advice to the governments of the UK on applications for degree awarding powers and university title. We are committed to supporting providers in the application process and held more than 20 meetings during the year with individual providers regarding their plans. In 2016–17:

10

ongoing applications for degree awarding powers continued under our scrutiny from the previous year

8

new applications were considered by our Advisory Committee on Degree Awarding Powers (ACDAP), of which six were allowed to proceed to detailed scrutiny

5

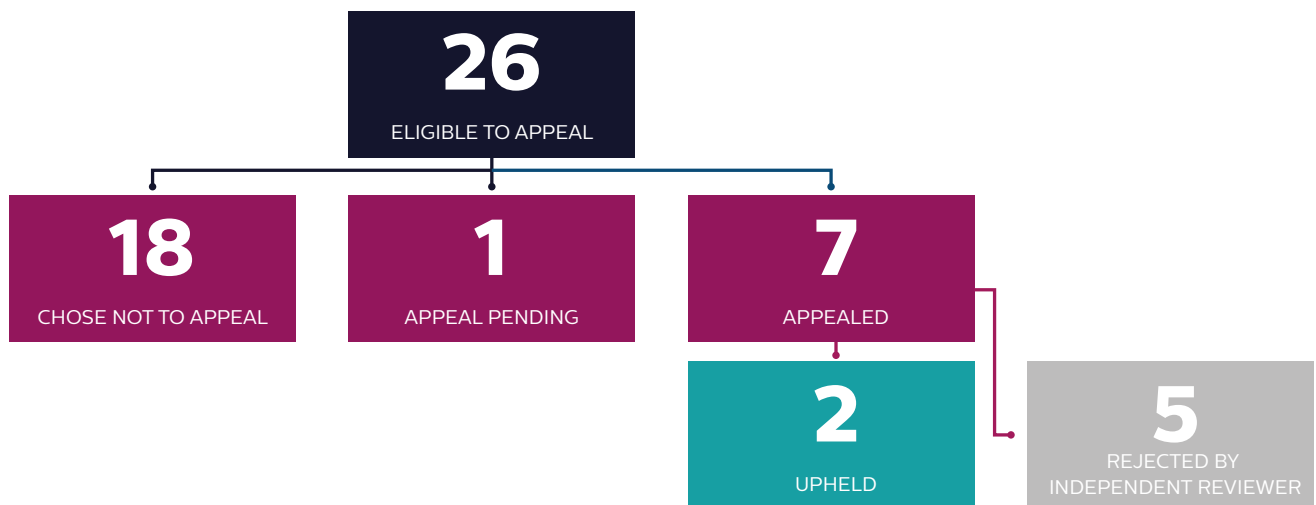
final reports on applications were considered by ACDAP, all of which were put forward for recommendation

3

updated handbooks for applicants were published for England, Scotland and Wales.

Appeals and complaints

We have a complaints procedure for anyone wishing to complain about QAA, and a separate appeals procedure for providers that want to appeal against the outcome of a QAA review. During this year:



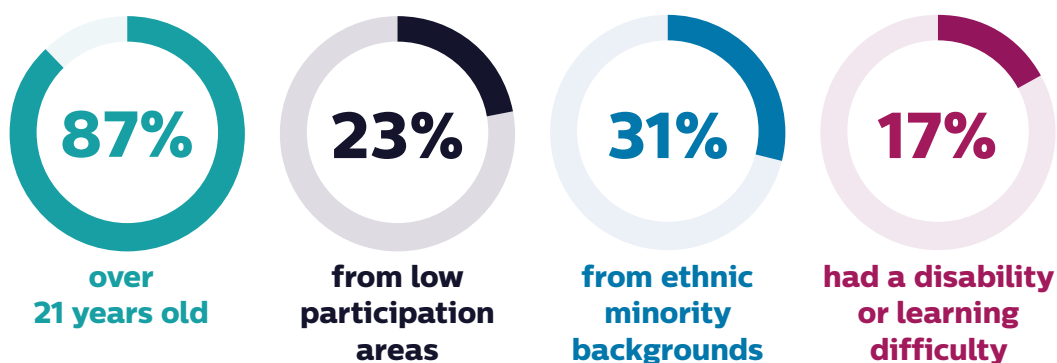
Access to HE

We are proud to manage the scheme for the recognition and quality assurance of Access to HE courses. The Access to HE Diploma is a qualification that prepares people without traditional qualifications for higher education study and which can transform lives. Our Access to HE Key Statistics (2015-16) report underlined the continued positive impact of this qualification in widening participation in higher education.

In October 2016, our fourth Higher Education Admissions Fair for Access to HE was held in London. Around 500 students attended, participating in a range of free workshops and talking to 30 exhibitors from the higher and further education sectors. We also implemented a new risk-based regulatory monitoring method for Access Validating Agencies (AVAs).

23,660

Access to HE Diploma students entered higher education in England and Wales, of whom



We will provide leadership,
through knowledge and resources,
in assuring and enhancing the quality
of higher education within the
UK and internationally

Policy developments

In Wales, we provided evidence to the Diamond and Hazelkorn Reviews on Welsh student finance support and the post-compulsory education landscape respectively. In Scotland, we contributed to government reviews of the 15-24 Learner Journey, and Skills and Enterprise.

The Higher Education and Research Act 2017, which received Royal Assent in April 2017, introduced the most significant reform of higher education in England since the 1990s.

As the Bill progressed through Parliament, we worked with the Department for Education and other sector stakeholders to provide advice and, in September 2016, our Chief Executive gave oral evidence to the House of Commons Public Bill Committee. There were around 80 positive mentions of QAA and UK higher education quality assurance in debates in both Houses.

UK Quality Code for Higher Education review

The Quality Code is the core reference point for UK quality and standards. We held two events this year through our Quality Enhancement Network to consider the future role and shape of the Quality Code. We are now working with the sector and the UK-wide Standing Committee on Quality Assessment to revise the Quality Code, to ensure it remains agile and responsive in the context of ongoing regulatory change.

Analysis and research

During the year, we undertook research and analysis to provide intelligence for our partners and stakeholders, and to contribute to the development of higher education policy.

We published a range of thematic reports and added to our Viewpoint series of policy papers, examining issues including: the postgraduate research student experience; how providers can work with employers to improve graduate outcomes; and standards and quality in alternative providers.

We also published 11 new good practice case studies, bringing our collection to over 65 papers on subjects including: assessment; employer engagement; and teaching and learning strategies. We continued to expand our online QAA Knowledgebase of thousands of recommendations, affirmations and features of good practice from our reviews. There were 367 recommendations, 76 affirmations and 148 features of good practice added during the year.

Enhancement events

In June 2017, we hosted the third International Enhancement Conference in Glasgow. The event was attended by over 500 delegates from 17 countries, with keynotes from speakers including Shirley-Anne Somerville MSP, Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science, and over 100 parallel sessions.

Eight Quality Enhancement Network events were held during the year, attended by over 300 delegates. The topics were selected based on demand from our subscribers and included: development of the Quality Code; enterprise and entrepreneurship; and the value of the PhD.



2017 annual conference

Our annual conference took place over two days in May in Nottingham. The event is designed as a forum for our subscribers to share knowledge, support their decision making and enable networking. There were 340 delegates in attendance at this year's conference, an increase of 15 per cent from 2016. The conference featured the launch of our new strategy, Building on World-Class Quality, which was very positively received.



We will extend and enhance the value and reach of our services within and beyond higher education

Subscriber and wider services

We launched a number of new valued-added services, some exclusively for our subscribers and some available to the wider sector, including:

- subscriber workshops on using data in quality and trend spotting, and the relationship of the Quality Code to the European Standards and Guidelines
- pilot programmes for our subscribers on new Good Practice Case Studies and guidance on the role of the European Standards and Guidelines in UK quality assessment
- our first online training course, Concepts of Quality.

Engagement

In a rapidly changing policy landscape, our engagement work with our stakeholders has been more important than ever this year. We conducted 171 visits to 122 providers, holding meetings with both quality practitioners and senior leadership. These meetings are important for the exchange of intelligence and ideas, and provide invaluable insights into what providers need from us now and in the future.

We are committed to working with students to involve and empower them in shaping their learning experiences. We have embedded students into our governance arrangements for a number of years, with two student members of our Board and a separate Student Advisory Committee. This year, we held two student conferences attended by a total of 291 delegates: Quality Matters (November 2016) and Evolving Student Engagement (May 2017), the latter run jointly with The Student Engagement Partnership.

We also work with professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) to make regulation more efficient. Two meetings of our PSRB Forum (a joint venture with the UK Inter-Professional Group) took place this year, with guest speakers from the sector and over 100 PSRB delegates at each.

Academic fraud, plagiarism and essay mills

Following our 2016 report on plagiarism and essay mills, we received a request from Jo Johnson, Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation, to continue our work in this area. We worked with Universities UK and the National Union of Students on the development of new guidance for providers and an information pack for students, which were published in October 2017. We have also secured international funding for the development of further materials relating to academic fraud and are linking into other international projects on academic integrity.

Higher and degree apprenticeships

We are members of the Institute for Apprenticeship's Quality Alliance, and are working with the Institute, government and sector partners to define roles and responsibilities for the regulation and quality of higher and degree apprenticeships. This has included contributing to the Department for Education's Apprenticeships Accountability Statement (April 2017) and producing our own sector guidance, Quality Assuring Higher Education in Apprenticeships: Current Approaches (May 2017). We are also working through our networks on the different approaches to apprenticeships being taken in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

International cooperation to support UK higher education

We are involved in a number of international projects, on behalf of UK higher education. These include the European-funded SHARE project to strengthen regional cooperation and enhance the quality of ASEAN higher education, working particularly with colleagues in Vietnam, Myanmar and the Philippines.

To extend international awareness and knowledge of the UK sector, we delivered presentations and workshops at a number of high profile international events. In early March 2017, our Chief Executive visited the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, as part of a delegation led by Universities UK International.

We are a full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), the umbrella organisation for quality assurance agencies in the European Higher Education Area. In autumn 2016, we hosted delegates from 45 countries in Gloucester for the ENQA General Assembly.

International training and capacity building

We successfully completed our first International Quality Reviews, after they were launched in spring 2016. These reviews are designed for international institutions wishing to undergo a review by QAA against the European Standards and Guidelines.

Our week-long International Quality Assurance Programmes (IQAP) have continued to attract colleagues from around the world to London to undertake continuing professional development, with the sixth IQAP taking place in October 2016. We have now welcomed over 120 delegates from 40 countries around the world since the programme's launch.

Organisational transformation programme

In June 2016, we began an organisational transformation programme to ensure the Agency is lean, responsive and meets the future needs of the sector. As part of this programme, targets of 26 per cent savings in pay and 25 per cent savings in non-pay were achieved, with a reduction of 69 FTE staff (38 per cent). A new organisational structure was implemented on 1 September 2016, with a programme to support colleagues in their new roles and new ways of working.

M5 Group collaboration

Our M5 Group collaboration with the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and Jisc has continued to develop and deliver benefits for the three organisations and our sector stakeholders.

Looking forward

The scale, diversity and delivery of higher education is changing, both in the UK and globally. So too is the regulatory environment, with reforms being implemented in all four nations of the UK. We are ready to meet these challenges, now and in the future.

Our new strategy, Building on World-Class Quality, was launched in April 2017, and supports our mission and work to deliver our vision of world-leading and independently assured higher education. It is underpinned by our core values of collaboration, innovation, expertise, accountability and integrity, and sets out clearly what we will deliver for UK higher education.

Building on World-Class Quality

We will be recognised and valued by student bodies, institutions and governments as:

- the expert independent quality body supporting a diverse system of co-regulation of UK higher education
- delivering valued services that provide assurance and drive quality enhancement
- using our international reputation and partnerships to benefit UK higher education.



Our strategic aims

Aim 1: We will be the expert independent quality body supporting a diverse system of co-regulation of UK higher education.

We will achieve this by:

- securing and undertaking quality assurance in Wales
- ensuring that QAA Scotland's enhancement-led approach delivers for, and has greater impact beyond, Scotland
- playing a key role in the design and implementation of the regulatory and quality system in England and Northern Ireland.

Aim 2: We will deliver valued services that provide assurance and drive quality enhancement.

We will achieve this by:

- being a trusted source of advice and guidance for UK higher education providers and UK governments
- contributing to improvements in the student learning experience
- developing and delivering innovative activities and services that meet the needs of our subscribers.

Aim 3: We will use our international reputation and partnerships to benefit UK higher education.

We will achieve this by:

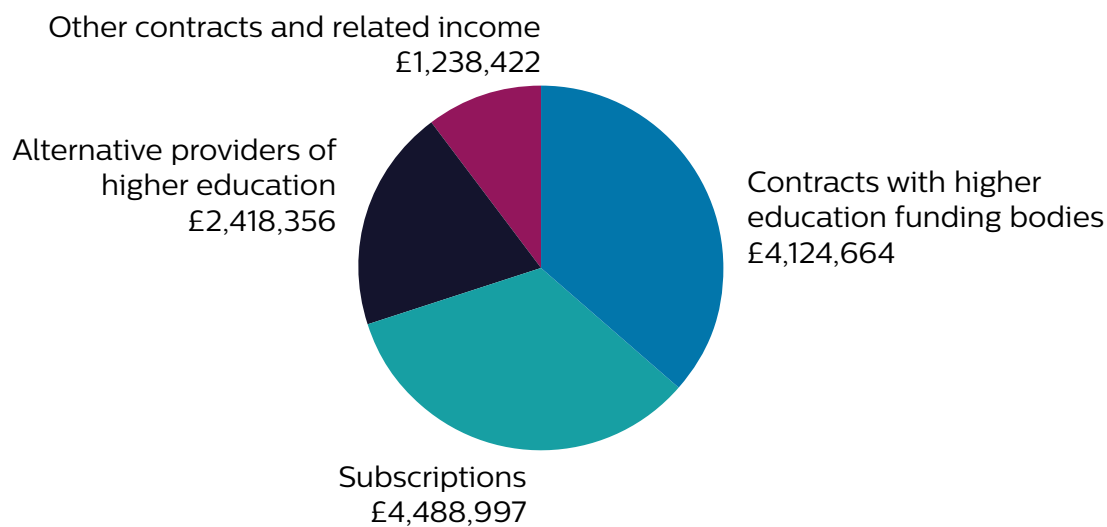
- providing targeted intelligence that supports the UK sector internationally
- working with international partners to seek improvements in the regulatory framework for UK TNE provision
- securing demand for our International Quality Reviews and other services that endorse us as a highly respected authority.

Underpinning these aims are the resourcing strategies to ensure QAA remains financially sustainable and organisationally effective, able to deliver our aims and remain true to our values.

Financial results

Our financial statements are prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Charities SORP. Our 2016-17 activities were funded primarily through contracts with the higher education funding bodies, subscriptions from higher education providers, and charges for oversight and review of alternative providers of higher education. Additional income was generated through other review activity, degree awarding powers applications, contributions from AVAs, conferences and investment income.

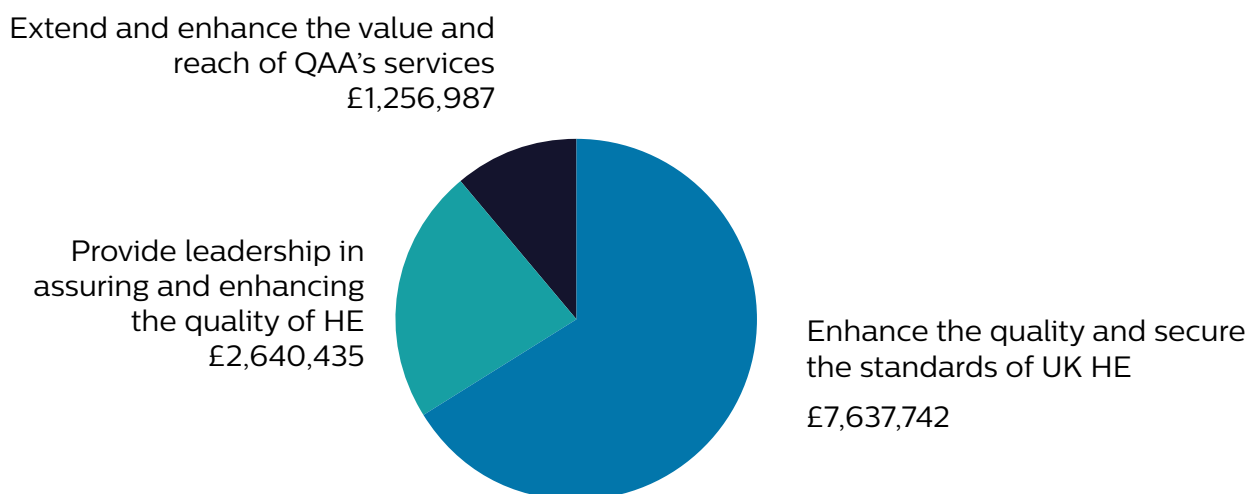
Income from charitable activities



Total income from charitable activities: £12,270,439.

Total income as shown in the Statement of Financial Activities (SOFA) decreased by £3,072,113 (19.9%) to £12,388,117 between 2015-16 and 2016-17, primarily due to changes in the funding structure as a result of the revised operating model for quality assessment, particularly in England.

Expenditure on charitable activities



Total expenditure as shown in the SOFA decreased by £4,233,860 (26.8%) to £11,588,138 between 2015-16 and 2016-17.

Governance and management

QAA is a private company limited by guarantee, and a registered charity in England, Wales and Scotland. Our 18 Board members represent the diversity of UK higher education, including students, with a rich mix of skills and experience.



- Six independent members with experience in industrial, commercial or financial matters, or professional practice
- Two student members
- Four higher education representative bodies
- Four higher education funding body members
- One independent member engaged in management or governance of an alternative provider
- One member from the UK Council of Colleges

Over the past year, we have continued the review of our governance structure and supporting processes, to ensure the future efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability of our decision making.

Our senior executive staff during 2016-17 were:

- Douglas Blackstock, Chief Executive
- Ian Kimber, Director of Universities, Quality Enhancement and Standards
- Will Naylor, Director of Colleges and Alternative Providers
- Rowena Pelik, Director of Nations and International
- Liz Rosser, Director of Resources.

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