

23 February 2024

Vicki Stott
Chief Executive
QAA

Dear Vicki,

Following the recent discussions between our organisations I am writing to formally commission the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), as the UK's recognised independent quality body, to conduct a review regarding programmes designed for international students that support their entry into UK higher education courses.

UK higher education rightly has an enviable reputation worldwide for the quality of its education. Every year it provides opportunities to hundreds of thousands of students both domestically, and from around the world. It makes a significant contribution to the economy of the UK. The Universities UK (UUK) Board is therefore minded to take action following the focus on recruitment practices relating to international students in recent weeks. It is essential that students (both international and domestic), their families, governments, and other stakeholders can have confidence that practices are fair, transparent and robust.

In line with QAA's advice, we would like you to conduct a review that:

- Compares the admissions requirements between foundation programmes for domestic students and international students
- Assesses the standards of the courses being offered to international students as both foundation programmes, and international year one programmes
- Assesses whether these standards are being achieved and maintained in practice.

To that end, we have agreed a series of review questions, which will be published on QAA's website as part of the [scoping document](#).

Chief Executive
Vivienne Stern MBE

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UUK will strongly encourage all of its members to participate in this review, and will work with other sector bodies to extend the reach beyond our membership. We anticipate that QAA will conduct review activity with up to 40 providers across the UK, with a representative sample to be selected by QAA. As this review will be conducted as a desk-based review, there will be no on-site visits. Providers will submit evidence electronically to QAA in line with QAA's requirements and expectations. We are grateful that you have indicated that you will hold online briefing sessions for providers at the outset of the process.

We are grateful that, recognising the importance of this work to the HE sector, QAA will meet some of the costs of this work, alongside a contribution from UUK and others in the sector. UUK will engage separately with you over the detail of the funding arrangements.

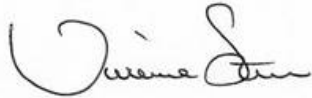
For transparency, it is essential that recognised reference points are used in the review. To that end, we have agreed that you will consider, as appropriate, the relevant level 3 expectations in each country (for example the Level 3 descriptor of the Regulated Qualifications Framework in England), the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ), the UK Quality Code (2018 version), and the Characteristics Statement for International Pathway Courses.

We understand that it is essential that QAA's independence and impartiality are maintained throughout the review, and that the review outcomes are robust. To this end, we would like you to provide updates only on operational progress during the review to the Quality Council for UK Higher Education (formerly known as the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment) as well as to UUK. We consider this most appropriate as it includes other sector representative bodies, but also the funders and regulators of higher education in each nation. The emerging findings of the review will not be disclosed during these updates to avoid any actual or perceived risk that the findings could be in any way influenced.

QAA shall be responsible for the contents and findings of the report. The report will be an anonymised, thematic report that allows the sector to understand the findings and learn and improve practice if required. We have agreed that you will provide a copy of this report to the Quality Council for UK Higher Education shortly in advance of publication, but QAA will publish the report itself. We would like the review to be conducted as rapidly as possible, and ideally for the report to be published by the end of spring, and in any event, no later than the end of this academic year. An anticipated timeline for activity is also included within the scoping document – we appreciate this may change during operational delivery and updates will be provided by QAA accordingly.

I am grateful for QAA's prompt engagement on this important matter and look forward to working with you on this review.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Vivienne Stern". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "V".

Vivienne Stern

Chief Executive

This letter was updated on March 1 to reflect up to date detail on the recruitment approach. This detail can be found in the addendum to the scoping document published on QAA's website.