

# TQF Bulletin, Spring 2021

Welcome to the TQF Bulletin - your quick guide to the activity of [The Quality Forum](#). Please feel free to share this with colleagues who might find it valuable.



*Photo credit: Alison Eales*

At the second of our three meetings of the session, we were delighted to welcome colleagues from Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University, and new colleagues from the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and QAA Scotland. The first hour of the meeting was largely dedicated to updates on sector-wide developments. First, we heard about the progress of the SFC's [Review of Coherent Provision and Sustainability](#), which was launched in the summer of 2020 and which at the time of writing is in its second phase. The Review has four objectives, the first of which is to 'consider how best

to achieve coherence and sustainability in the delivery of further and higher education during the Covid-19 crisis, EU exit transition, and beyond, while maintaining and enhancing quality' (see the [FAQ](#) published on the SFC website). Phase one involved an open Call for Evidence, the findings of which have been published. The findings of the second phase of the Review are due for publication in March 2021. It is likely that the third phase of the Review will involve engagement with specific colleague groups, and TQF members agreed that they would welcome the opportunity to engage with this process.

We then heard an update on the [Consultation on Regulating Quality and Standards in Higher Education](#) that had been opened by the Office for Students (OFS) in November 2020. This consultation is now closed, and [QAA has published a response](#). While the four proposals under consideration are specific to English providers, their adoption would potentially have implications for higher education UK-wide. It was understood that the volume of responses to the consultation had been high, and that this had included responses from institutions and agencies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. TQF members welcomed the idea of a 'think tank' to consider the implications of the proposals once the OFS had published its response.

In terms of updates from sector agencies, [Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland \(sparqs\)](#) reported on recent developments, including [a new project aiming to celebrate student partnership during the pandemic](#). Members are encouraged to send any contributions to sparqs by the end of March. Advance HE continue to produce engaging and valuable member resources around key themes (race equality; students as partners; organisational resilience and transformation), developed in partnership with other agencies and drawing on international expertise.

QAA Scotland encouraged members to progress institutional sign-up to the UK-wide [Academic Integrity Charter](#). [Universities Scotland](#) reported that current priorities for the Learning and Teaching Committee included support for student transitions in session 2021-22, and academic integrity. Members agreed that academic integrity would make for a valuable topic for discussion at a future meeting, and welcomed the idea of a whole-sector approach.

The University of St Andrews shared their [Can Do](#) resource, which supports staff and students to organise in-person social activities that are compliant with COVID restrictions. Members are encouraged to share further examples of this kind of work on the TQF Yammer Network.

In the second half of the meeting, members selected one of three breakout groups for discussion on different priority topics: online learning and teaching, microcredentials, and planning for 2021-22 and the remainder of 2020-21. The group considering online learning and teaching reported that they had acknowledged that not all staff had the same levels of competence and confidence in this area, and shared approaches to upskilling staff. This encompassed both institutional responses and personal reflections. The group also considered a potential gap in digital competence and confidence among incoming students, and ways in which this might be addressed, such as adapted summer schools. It was suggested that this might benefit from a sector-wide approach.

The group discussing microcredentials noted that these were difficult to define. Most institutions already run CPD and short courses, and are working to understand which (if any) of these might be considered 'microcredentials'. Credit values were offered as one way of making the distinction (for example, microcredentials having a maximum value of five credits). The group also noted that institutional systems are not necessarily equipped for programmes of study that do not lead to a degree, and that the administrative systems put in place to make them possible can be burdensome. The group shared approaches to admissions (including admission criteria) and certification (including digital badges), and also considered the matter of student support and access to institutional facilities. Members were encouraged to engage with the [collaborative cluster looking at microcredentials and digital badging](#).

The group discussing planning for the remainder of 2020-21, and looking ahead to 2021-22, acknowledged that the ongoing uncertainty posed the biggest planning challenge. The group agreed that it was important to capture what had been learned during the pandemic and which changes should be retained, both in terms of learning and teaching, and quality processes. The group also considered governance implications (for example, identifying how learning and teaching might intersect with responsibility for health and safety). The importance of student engagement was also emphasised.

**TQF is a forum for sharing practice on matters of teaching quality, and colleagues are encouraged to suggest items for discussion. Our next meeting is on 3 June 2021. Please [get in touch with QAA Scotland](#) if you would like to share practice from your institution or learn more about practice across the sector. You can also join the [TQF Yammer Network](#).**