QAA

Annual report to the Higher Education Funding Council for England

January 2013

Contents

Critical overview of QAA's performance

Introduction

1.1   The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's (QAA's) mission is 'to safeguard standards and improve the quality of UK higher education'. To this end, QAA performs the following functions under its contract with the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE):

- carries out reviews of higher education provision in higher education institutions (HEIs) and further education colleges (FECs)
- develops and maintains the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code)
- responds to concerns raised by students, staff and other people and organisations about academic quality and standards. QAA will investigate concerns where it thinks these concerns indicate serious systemic or procedural problems
- promotes understanding of academic standards and quality in UK higher education and the methods used for their assurance.

1.2   QAA's Strategy 2011-14 identifies four strategic aims to guide its work:

- to meet students' needs and be valued by them
- to safeguard standards in an increasingly diverse UK and international context
- to drive improvements in UK higher education
- to improve public understanding of higher education standards and quality.

1.3   The contract between QAA and HEFCE for 2012-13 requires QAA to provide a detailed account of review and enhancement activity for the academic year 1 August 2011 to 31 July 2012. The contract stipulates that:

'QAA shall by 31 January each year prepare and submit to HEFCE a report which:

a. Makes a critical assessment of performance against all contractual obligations - providing robust evidence of whether, and how, priorities and activities have been achieved.

b. Provides a summary and overview of all review activity undertaken by QAA as set out in paragraphs 14-17, including a section on any developments in the review of collaborative provision and transnational education.

c. Provides commentary on relevant developments in the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

d. Identifies, and analyses the main themes and trends arising from activities, and the inferences that may be drawn from them about the trends in quality and standards in higher education in England, and the role that reviews have in enhancement within institutions and across the sector.

e. For the Review of College HE, Institutional review and mid-cycle follow-up, includes a 'Report on Evaluations, being a report on institutions', contract reviewers', review co-ordinators', reviewers' and (where applicable) subject specialist reviewers' evaluation of reviews, mid-cycle follow-ups and review visits undertaken in the preceding academic year. As well as evaluating the process, the report should assess the effectiveness and value of the review method as it is

perceived by the institutions reviewed as well as the reviewers, in relation to the maintenance of standards, quality of student learning opportunities, the enhancement of quality and the management of the quality of public information.

f. Distinguishes between different groups of HEIs and different groups of FECs, using such categories as may be relevant for the purpose.

g. Makes a critical assessment of all key developments to date and makes recommendations with a view to further action, by HE providers, QAA, HEFCE or other relevant parties, to sustain and improve quality and standards, and address any weaknesses.

h. Provides a summary and overview of quality enhancement activity undertaken with the sector and other relevant bodies (including the Higher Education Academy), which demonstrates clearly the role of each partner organisation and the impact of the work undertaken.

i. Provides a summary of equality and diversity work within QAA.

1.3   This report is provided in compliance with the above contractual requirements. It supplements and draws on other reports provided to HEFCE under the contract, such as *Directors' report and financial statements for the year ended 31 July 2012* and *Concerns about standards and quality: annual report for 2011-12*, as well as quarterly reports provided to HEFCE and numerous papers to QAA's Board of Directors which HEFCE receives because of its observer status at the Board.

Reviews

2.1   QAA sets key performance indicators (KPIs) relating to the scheduling of reviews and the publication of reports. The results for 2011-12 show an improvement on 2010-11, with 100 per cent compliance with the requirements of Part B, sections 3 and 4, of the HEFCE contract in 2011-12.

Area	Indicator	YE 2010-11	YE 2011-12	Trend
Contracted reviews (IQER/IRENI)	% done to schedule	97%	**100%**	↑
Publication of reports (IQER/IRENI)	% done to schedule	93%	**100%**	↑

2.2   Compliance with this aspect of the HEFCE contract is robustly monitored, and a Performance Dashboard has now been developed giving 'real time' data with respect to the scheduling of reviews and publication of reports.

2.3   Evaluations of our reviews have been undertaken, and full commentary on these is provided in Annex 1. These confirm that the majority of reviewers and institutions believe the reviews met their aim.

2.4   We have identified our work in evaluation as an area requiring development, and in 2012-13 a new internal quality assurance framework will be developed. A 5 per cent increase in positive feedback across all evaluations undertaken for all review activity for 2012-13 has been set as a target.

2.5   No reviews falling under the contract with HEFCE were subject to appeal in 2011-12. However, as a result of QAA's work in educational oversight for the UK Borders Agency (UKBA), where a relatively high number of appeals were anticipated in 2011-12, development work was undertaken on the appeals process for that method. Under the revised arrangements, poorly conceived appeals are 'screened out' at an early stage where they are deemed to have no realistic prospect of being upheld. It was also decided that the outcomes of appeals would, for the first time, be published alongside review reports on QAA's website. From January 2013 the newly developed appeals process will also apply to all review methods including Institutional Review, England and Northern Ireland (IRENI) and Review of College Higher Education (RCHE), and appeals outcomes for all methods will be published.

2.6   In December 2011 for the first time we published an analysis of the profile of our reviewers, looking at such characteristics as gender, age, ethnicity, title, highest qualification and employing/studying institution. We will undertake such an analysis on an annual basis. The December 2012 analysis has shown that 21 per cent of our reviewers hold professorial title (compared to 10 per cent of all academic staff, according to 2010-11 HESA data), and 41 per cent hold a doctoral degree as their highest qualification.

2.7   In September 2011, Institutional Audit was replaced by IRENI as the review method for higher education institutions. A new method for the review of higher education in further education, RCHE, was also developed in 2011-12. There is now greater similarity of approach between the two review methods, representing QAA's move to a common review framework.

2.8   Students have actively participated in IRENI reviews, both as reviewers and as key sources of evidence for review teams - for example, through a Student Written Submission. In 2011-12 QAA trained 30 student reviewers to take part in our review methods. While student reviewers have not participated in Integrated Quality and Enhancement Reviews (IQER), the development of the new review method, RCHE, has introduced student reviewers, and provided for a lead student representative to play a role akin to the institutional facilitator from the student perspective. Full details on QAA's student engagement work can be found in Annex 5.

2.9   With regard to transnational education (TNE), QAA undertook the preparatory stages of the review of courses leading to UK awards in China, culminating in a visit to China in November 2012. This involved the collection of information from UK providers about their TNE activity in China and a desk-based study of material in advance of the visit. This work has been a pilot of a new review method for TNE, on the basis of which QAA plans to publish a new Handbook in 2013. Details of the TNE China review can be found in Annex 2.

2.10   QAA's work undertaking reviews of alternative providers requiring educational oversight for the purposes of obtaining Highly Trusted Sponsor status with UKBA has provided QAA with information on the collaborative partners of HEIs. The evidence both here, and through QAA's Concerns scheme (see paragraph 3.1), continues to point to collaborative provision as an area of particular concern. The move towards a more risk-based approach to quality assurance will not reduce QAA's interest in collaborative activities, and is likely to be a factor in determining the intensity of a review under the new method.

2.11   In 2011-12, QAA worked constructively with HEFCE, as a member of the Regulatory Partnership Group, in responding to the Government's White Paper, *Students at the Heart of the System,* and the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) Technical Consultation, on proposals to change the regulatory framework for higher education in England, and in particular to introduce a more risk-based approach to quality assurance.

2.12   In October 2011, QAA submitted its response to the BIS Technical Consultation, stressing the need for all providers of higher education to be part of a common regulatory framework that has independent quality assurance at its core. QAA worked with HEFCE in the development of its consultation on risk-based quality assurance, to which QAA provided a response in July 2012. Following HEFCE's invitation in November 2012 to implement a more risk-based approach to quality assurance, QAA is about to publish for consultation its handbook for the new method.

Compliance with contractual obligations

QAA cites the above to demonstrate full compliance with the following obligations under the contract.

- To complete the IQER programme (Part B, 3a).
- To publish a report of the findings of each IQER within 15 working weeks, unless extended because of a second visit (Part B, 3c).
- To complete the Institutional Review programme (Part B, 4a).
- To publish a report of the findings of each Institutional Review within 12 working weeks (Part B, 4c).
- Promote the benefits of student involvement in quality management, engage students in the work of QAA and as members of review teams (Part B, 13e).
- Consideration be given to the future of IQER (Part B, 12), and keep the Handbooks for IQER and Institutional Review under review (Part B, 13a).
- Work with HEFCE and other appropriate bodies on responding effectively to the Government White Paper on higher education (Part B, 13q).

Concerns about standards and quality in higher education

3.1   The number of applications received under QAA's Concerns scheme continued to grow in 2011-12. In 2009-10 QAA received 24 applications, followed by 42 in 2010-11 (a 75 per cent increase on the previous year), with 58 applications in 2011-12 (a further 38 per cent increase on the previous year). In addition, 249 email enquiries relating to the scheme were made in 2011-12.

3.2   Of the 58 applications received in 2011-12, we met our published schedule for acknowledging receipt and informing the applicant whether we could investigate in all cases. Eleven of these applications proceeded to an initial inquiry. Our schedule for completing the inquiry and informing the applicant whether the case was proceeding to full investigation was met in all but one case.

3.3   Three full investigation reports were completed in 2011-12, two of which relate to HEFCE-funded institutions. All reports were published within the deadline under QAA's published schedule.

3.4   The concerns most frequently raised in applications received in 2011-12 were regarding admissions (including the refund of fees or deposits after non-admissions), assessment and providers' use of assessment regulations. Those applications which progressed to full investigation concerned the application of academic regulations and providers' collaborative provision.

3.5   The Performance Dashboard, mentioned above, again serves as a useful tool, giving 'real time' data on the processing of applications in accordance with published service standards.

3.6 QAA anticipates that the scheme will continue to grow, particularly with the onset of a more risk-based quality assurance regime. QAA will promote the scheme in cooperation with the National Union of Students (NUS) to raise its profile.

3.7 QAA's Board of Directors has also asked that evidential threshold required for a concern to proceed to an initial inquiry is reviewed, to ensure that an unfair burden is not being placed on students and other applicants to the scheme to gather necessary evidence.

3.8 Please see *Concerns about standards and quality: annual report for 2011-12* for further details on QAA's work in this area.

Compliance with contractual obligations

QAA cites the above to demonstrate full compliance with the following obligations under the contract.

- QAA shall identify and handle concerns about standards and quality in higher education…in accordance with the details published on its website (Part B, 7-9).

UK Quality Code for higher education

4.1 In December 2011, QAA launched the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) to replace the set of national reference points known as the Academic Infrastructure (AI). This followed an evaluation of the AI conducted in 2010-11.

4.2 The Quality Code sets out the formal Expectations that all UK higher education providers reviewed by QAA are required to meet.

4.3 A development programme is in place up to October 2013 to review Chapters of the Quality Code to ensure they are up to date and fit for purpose. In accordance with this programme, in 2011-12 QAA consulted and published Part C: Information about higher education provision, revised Chapters on external examining and research degrees, and a new Chapter on student engagement. Consultation events were held in all parts of the UK, and reports of the consultation are published on QAA's website. Evaluations from the consultation events have also been published on the website. Full details are given in Annex 3.

Compliance with contractual obligations

QAA cites the above to demonstrate full compliance with the following obligations under the contract.

- Consult and advise HEFCE about ongoing development or revisions to the UK Code of Practice for standards, quality and enhancement which may affect HEFCE's interests in the assurance of the higher education (Part B, 13b).

Enhancement

5.1 QAA has continued to drive improvements in higher education through the commissioning of research (for example collaborative projects with NUS), developmental events held jointly with the Higher Education Academy (HEA) on external examining, and

through the acquisition of the Higher Education Empirical Research (HEER) database. QAA continued to publish the Outcomes series, giving a thematic analysis of the outcomes from Institutional Audit and IQER. QAA introduced in 2011-12 *Talking about quality*, a series of articles in which experts explore issues of key interest to the higher education sector.

5.2   Internal re-structuring within QAA led to the formation of the Research, Development and Partnerships Group in March 2011. This has strengthened QAA's capacity to identify and disseminate good practice, maximise the use made of QAA's data and information, carry out and commission research, and develop and maintain partnerships, increasing the impact of QAA's work in the UK and internationally.

5.3   In 2012-13 QAA will develop further our work in enhancement through the launch of a Good Practice Knowledgebase, a new online resource which will provide a search facility of good practice and recommendations deriving from QAA reviews and case studies provided by institutions. QAA has established a Research Advisory Group to underpin its research strategy, which has a number of external members who are research active in the field of higher education.

5.4   Full details of QAA's work in enhancement are given in Annex 4.

Compliance with contractual obligations

QAA cites the above to demonstrate full compliance with the following obligations under the contract.

- Support and advise HEFCE on the relationship between quality assurance and quality enhancement…(including) the continued production of analytic and thematic reports and publications on the outcomes of particular audit and review activity (Part B, 13h).
- Develop a coordinated programme of development and enhancement activities, including the enhancement of teaching and learning, and the identification and promotion of innovation and good practice (Part B, 13i).

Public Engagement

6.1   In 2011-12 QAA has raised its profile through media, events, networking and using more interactive, user-centred communication channels. Institutions' review judgements are now communicated more widely. For example:

- each institution now has its own web 'splash' page and review reports can be accessed in a number of ways: by A-Z listing, by region or by date of publication. Web analytics show that the institution reports section of the website is consistently the most frequently accessed
- reports are now only published online, not printed, and the web format was developed through user testing with key audience personas. Reports are more accessible: shorter in length and written in clearer English
- QAA works with local press to publicise outcomes of college/university reviews
- links to all recent institution reports are now included in our monthly QAA news email bulletin, which currently has almost 3,700 subscribers
- review reports are increasingly linked on websites frequently accessed by prospective students: UNISTATS, UCAS and Which? University.

6.2   In March 2012 the Board of Directors agreed to put in place a QAA Quality Mark scheme (formally launched in August 2012). The purpose of the mark is to provide visible

and easily understood information to the public to reassure them that those UK universities and colleges with the mark have been successfully reviewed by QAA and therefore meet national expectations for academic quality and standards.

6.3   Of the 161 higher education institutions currently eligible to use the QAA Quality Mark, 103 have returned letters of agreement for its use and we know of 24 institutions that are currently using the mark on their communications. We expect the usage number to increase significantly over the next few months. In October 2012, the QAA's Board of Directors approved the extension of the scheme to include QAA subscribers reviewed by QAA under IQER and its successor from 2013, RCHE. This was launched in January 2013.

Compliance with contractual obligations

QAA cites the above to demonstrate full compliance with the following obligations under the contract.

- Continue its activities to make the quality assurance system more public-facing, through ensuring QAA public information is clearly presented, incorporates plain English summaries where appropriate and uses simpler language.

Equality and diversity

7.1   QAA published its Single Equality Scheme and action plan in July 2011. All the actions scheduled for completion in 2011-12 were achieved on time, and a number of the objectives originally scheduled for 2012-13 were completed within 2011-12. The first annual report of the Single Equality Scheme was published in October 2012.

7.2   In 2011-12 we introduced (ahead of schedule) additional monitoring of employees and job applicants for sexuality and religion, and introduced an organisation-wide training package in equality and diversity which has been completed by all staff.

7.3   A number of specific questions relating to equalities issues were included in the 2012 staff survey, with the following results.

- My colleagues treat me with dignity and respect - 92 per cent agree.
- I understand and apply principles of equality and diversity in my work - 94 per cent agree.
- I am aware of QAA's Single Equality Scheme - 89 per cent agree.
- The training I received on equality/diversity was useful - 57 per cent agree.

7.4   The mixed response to training has been the subject of further discussion with staff, indicating that staff wish to move on from fact-based training about QAA's legal duties into a more open-ended and developmental engagement with equality and diversity issues.

7.5   As mentioned above, in December 2011 we published data on the key characteristics of our reviewers, including ethnicity, gender and age. QAA has been able to increase the diversity of our reviewer cohort as a consequence of taking on new areas of work such as our programme of educational oversight for UKBA. A new cadre of Review Coordinators have been recruited - largely with experience of further education and private colleges - and a significant number of additional reviewers, many of whom are from private colleges and with no prior experience of QAA. As and when we are successful in contracting for additional programmes of review, we will actively seek to encourage even greater diversity in our expanding reviewer pool.

7.6   Full data for 2011-12 on QAA's staff is given in the Human Resources and Organisational Development annual report for 2011-12 which was presented to the Board of Directors in December 2012. Data for QAA's reviewers is included in the Single Equality Scheme annual report for 2011-12 which was presented to the Board of Directors in October 2012.

Compliance with contractual obligations

QAA cites the above to demonstrate full compliance with the following obligations under the contract.

- In the management of its affairs and the implementation and monitoring of its policies on equality and diversity, QAA shall cooperate with HEFCE in the light of HEFCE's statutory duties and QAA shall take such steps as QAA considers appropriate to deliver the commitment of its Single Equality Scheme.

Conclusion: Key achievements in 2011-12 and future developments

8.1   QAA has successfully implemented a new review method for higher education institutions (IRENI), delivered all reviews and reports to schedule, and developed a new review method for college higher education (RCHE). These changes have ensured that students are not just stakeholders, but are full participants in the process, putting students at 'the heart of the system'. Review reports are more accessible, being in clearer English, and are more widely publicised.

8.2   QAA's work in China has provided the basis for a new review method for TNE, an area of work which we believe to be critical to assuring that standards are met wherever UK qualifications are delivered in the world. We continue to discuss with partners how the funding of such work can be put on a more secure footing, so that a more systematic approach to TNE review can be implemented.

8.3   QAA's work with HEFCE in the development of a more risk-based approach to quality assurance will help secure a quality assurance system for the future which will fully meet the principles of better regulation in being proportionate, accountable, consistent, transparent and targeted. Following the invitation from HEFCE to implement such an approach, we have now developed a handbook for the revised review method, which is currently out for consultation.

8.4   The Concerns scheme has continued to grow, acting as a key means by which QAA is able to identify systemic issues within higher education providers, other than through the mechanism of periodic review. We anticipate that this trend will continue, and in 2012-13 we will work with the NUS to raise further the profile of the scheme with students and will consider ways to make it easier for students to raise concerns.

8.5   QAA has responded to messages from the higher education sector from consultations and evaluations conducted by QAA in 2010-11 on the AI by launching the Quality Code. In relation to specific changes in 2011-12, the publication of Part C as a new discrete publication has highlighted the need for information about learning opportunities to be 'fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy', and provided the basis for sound judgements to be made by QAA review teams on the accuracy and completeness of information.

8.6   Going forward, we aim to introduce a more systematic approach to the evaluation of the effectiveness of our activities. To this end, in 2013 we will introduce an internal quality

assurance framework. Furthermore, we are looking at ways to better measure the impact of what we do. This is an issue that quality assurance agencies across Europe are grappling with, and we are working alongside our partners in Europe through participation in an ENQA working group on the impact of quality assurance.

8.7 In 2012, in recognition of QAA's increasing involvement with further education colleges (FECs) who provide higher education, QAA invited further education colleges to become voluntary subscribers to QAA, and QAA's Board of Directors now includes a nominee from the UK Council of Colleges. QAA looks forward to many more further education colleges subscribing to QAA. We also anticipate that more alternative providers will choose to voluntarily subscribe to QAA, to enrich further the relationship that has already been fostered with this part of the sector through our educational oversight activities. As our subscriber base becomes more diverse, we will be making sure that the services we offer to subscribers truly reflect their differing needs. This will be a key priority for QAA in 2013.

Annex 1: Review method changes, activity, evaluations and impact

1 Review method changes

1.1 In September 2011 IRENI replaced Institutional Audit (IA) as the review process for HEIs in England and Northern Ireland. There is an overlap period and some providers had a mid-cycle follow up review as part of IA in the 2011-12 operating year. RCHE will commence in 2012-13. The new methods (IRENI and RCHE) have much common ground, representing a convergence within a common review framework, and they may be envisaged as a single approach that is adapted for context. Both new methods were developed to ensure flexibility in response to the demands of a dynamic HE environment and to be more risk-based in approach. Each method incorporates greater emphasis on the student voice, with additional roles for students within the review process.

1.2 The new methods (IRENI and RCHE) particularly address the following issues identified through consultation:

- the need for increased flexibility to meet the demands of a dynamic environment
- the desire for convergence around a common review framework.
- the importance of greater student engagement.
- the need to be proportionate and risk-based.
- The significance of evidence bases and impact.

1.3 The common framework used for IRENI and RCHE has provided the basis for the newly proposed Higher Education Review method (HER), which is currently subject to consultation.

2 Activity

IRENI

2.1 During 2011-12 there were 13 IRENI reviews of HEFCE-funded providers. There were also two IRENI reviews of private HEI subscribers. Of the HEFCE-funded subscribers, all met expectations regarding standards, 11 met expectations regarding quality and nine met expectations regarding enhancement. Three were commended on enhancement, two required improvement in quality and one required improvement in enhancement. Figures derived from the published reports are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: IRENI outcomes 2011-12

	Academic standards of the institution's awards	Quality of student learning opportunities	Enhancement of student learning opportunities
Meets UK expectations	13	11	9
Does not meet UK expectations	0	N/A	N/A
Is commended	N/A	0	3
Requires improvement to meet UK expectations	N/A	2	0

2.2   Comparisons with previous years present challenges, as IRENI has replaced IA. If, however, some simplifications are made, a broad brush picture may be presented. For such a comparison only standards and quality will be considered. In addition, only two categories will be used for summarising judgements. For standards these are: meets expectations/confidence and does not meet expectations/fails to achieve confidence. For quality these are: meets expectations/confidence and requires improvement to meet expectations/fails to achieve confidence. The term 'fails to achieve confidence' is used in this context to denote limited confidence of any kind and no confidence. The figures are shown in Table 2 and Table 3.

Table 2: Comparison of IA and IRENI judgements on standards, 2008-12

Standards	2008-09 (IA)	2009-10 (IA)	2010-11 (IA)	2011-12 (IRENI)
Meets UK expectations (IRENI) or achieves a confidence judgement (IA)	37	28	25	13
Does not meet UK expectations (IRENI) or fails to achieve a judgement of confidence (IA)	3	2	2	0

Table 3: Comparison of IA and IRENI judgements on quality, 2008-12

Quality	2008-09 (IA)	2009-10 (IA)	2010-11 (IA)	2011-12 (IRENI)
Meets UK expectations (IRENI) or achieves a confidence judgement (IA)	38	30	26	11
Requires improvement to meet UK expectations (IRENI) or fails to achieve a judgement of confidence (IA)	2	0	1	2

2.3   Table 4 shows a comparison of numbers of recommendations for the years 2008-12. Again, some simplification is need as the comparison is across two different methods. It may appear that IRENI has resulted in more recommendations per review than had been the case for IA, but the comparison should be across all types of recommendation under IA. On this basis IRENI would seem to be resulting in fewer recommendations per review. With the maturing of institutions and the experience gained from reviews, this would seem to be appropriate. It is, however, too early to tell if this is as a result of the method itself, and further monitoring is needed.

Table 4: Numbers of recommendations, 2008-12

Judgement	2008-09 (IA)	2009-10 (IA)	2010-11 (IA)	2011-12* (IRENI)
Desirable	121 (3.0)	88 (2.9)	91 (2.9)	
Advisable	104 (2.6)	100 (3.3)	100 (3.3)	52 (4.0)
Essential	5 (0.1)	2 (0.1)	3 (0.1)	
Total reviews	40	30	27	13

Note: the figure in () denotes the mean number by review
* Recommendations are no longer categorised

2.4   Table 5 shows recommendations categorised against areas. This categorisation will change as of 2012-13, from when recommendations will be classified against Chapters of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code). This provides for greater consistency and links the Quality Code directly to review activity. This linking should be done as part of the review report, with the review team noting the relevant Quality Code Chapter against each recommendation. This approach also helps in providing and demonstrating transparency. All of this is especially relevant with the advent of QAA's new searchable Recommendations Knowledgebase. Table 6 shows good practice against particular areas that have been used previously to help categorise the summary. This categorisation will change as of 2012-13, from when good practice will be classified against chapters of the Quality Code and also against the Learner Journey. This provides for greater consistency and links the Quality Code directly to review activity. This linking should be done as part of the review report, with the review team noting the relevant Quality Code Chapter and aspect of the Learner Journey against each item of good practice. This approach also helps in providing and demonstrating transparency. All of this is especially relevant with the advent of QAA's new Good Practice Knowledgebase.

Table 5: Areas of recommendations, 2011-12

Areas of recommendations	
Academic Infrastructure	11
Assessment	5
Employer engagement	-
Institution's quality management	19
Public information	6
Staff development	5
Student experience	6
Total	52

Table 6: Areas of good practice, 2011-12

Areas of good practice	
Academic Infrastructure	5
Assessment	2
Employer engagement	1
Institution's quality management	2
Public information	1
Staff development	1
Student experience	30

Total	42

IQER

2.5   During the period there were 83 IQER summative reviews of HEFCE-funded providers. Of these, 81 had confidence regarding academic standards. One had a limited confidence judgement on standards and one had a no confidence judgement on standards. Within quality of learning opportunities, 82 had confidence and one had limited confidence. There were 82 judgements of reliance and one of no reliance. These figures are shown in Table 7.

Table 7: IQER summative review outcomes 2011-12

	Academic standards	Quality	Public information
Confidence	81	82	N/A
Limited confidence	1	1	N/A
No confidence	1	0	N/A
Reliance	N/A	N/A	82
No reliance	N/A	N/A	1

2.6   Table 8 shows IQER summative judgements from 2008-12. The number of reviews in this area increased significantly over the period. 2011-12 is the last full year of IQER, with its replacement, RCHE, commencing in 2012-13.

Table 8: IQER judgements, 2011-12

	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12
Desirable	79 (3.29)	244 (3.70)	259 (3.45)	242 (2.91)
Advisable	48 (2.00)	128 (1.94)	137 (1.82)	114 (1.37)
Essential	2 (0.08)	5 (0.08)	1 (0.01)	5 (0.06)
Total reviews	24	66	75	83

Note: the figure in () denotes the average number by review

2.7   Tables 9 and 10 show how recommendations and good practice are distributed. This categorisation will change as of 2012-13, when RCHE is operational, from when recommendations will be classified against Chapters of the Quality Code. This provides for greater consistency and links the Quality Code directly to review activity. This linking should be done as part of the review report, with the review team noting the relevant Quality Code Chapter against each recommendation. This approach also helps in providing and demonstrating transparency and will be mirrored with good practice, with the addition of the Learner Journey classification. All of this is especially relevant with the advent of QAA's new searchable Recommendations Knowledgebase and the Good Practice Knowledgebase.

Table 9: Recommendations categories, 2011-12

Areas of recommendations	
Academic Infrastructure	11%
Assessment	3%
Employer engagement	6%
Institution's quality management	36%
Public information	17%

Staff development	13%
Student experience	14%
Total	100%

Table 10: Good practice categories, 2011-12

Areas of good practice	
Academic Infrastructure	7%
Assessment	7%
Employer engagement	11%
Institution's quality management	25%
Public information	8%
Staff development	15%
Student experience	27%
Total	100%

Report on evaluations

Overview

3.1   QAA is committed to reflecting on its processes by undertaking a formal evaluation of all its review and associated activities. Evaluation serves a variety of purposes, not least of which is reporting to HEFCE and other stakeholders as part of QAA's contractual requirements. Such systematic evaluation allows for the identification of good practice and highlights aspects of activity where there is scope for further development as part of the process of continual improvement.

3.2   Review evaluations form an important part of QAA's own quality assurance processes and they will be a major aspect of QAA's new quality assurance framework. Such evaluations are complemented by evaluations of review briefing and training events.

3.3   During 2011-12, QAA undertook evaluation and monitoring of various review activities and training and briefing events. All evaluation and monitoring activity took place in accordance with QAA's evaluation policy. For the future, such evaluations will be within QAA's internal quality assurance framework. This section provides an overview of the evaluation of QAA's reviews in 2011-12.

3.4   Following the completion of all review and associated activities, formal evaluation was undertaken by means of questionnaire surveys. The evaluation involved all relevant participant stakeholder groups - student representative bodies, institutions and reviewers/auditors. Overall, QAA is confident that stakeholders are broadly satisfied that the review processes and associated training and briefing events have achieved their intended aims and met the expectations of those involved.

3.5   In general, response rates were high and feedback was very positive. On the whole, respondents agreed that each review activities had either completely met the stated aims or had largely met the stated aims. Having stated this, QAA has adjusted its approach to this question in order to facilitate critical feedback. This has worked well and is discussed below.

IRENI

3.6   As shown in Table 11, a total of 88 responses were received from a potential sample of 115 people. Table 12 shows stakeholder views regarding achievement of review aim.

Table 11: Review evaluation responses

Role	Sent	Received
Reviewer	37	33
Secretary	16	13
Lead Student Rep	14	3
Student Reviewer	16	12
Institution	16	11
QAA Officer	16	16
Total	115	88

Table 12: Responses to the question 'To what extent do you think the review you have recently experienced achieved its aim?'

Role	Completely	To a large extent	To some extent
Reviewer	21	36	1
Institutional Facilitator	1	7	3
Lead Student Representative	2	1	0
QAA Officer	9	7	0
Total	33	51	4

3.7   In previous years respondents had been given only 'Yes' or 'No' options to a similar question. This approach tended to result in almost 100 per cent of respondents indicating that each review met its aims fully. As a learning organisation, QAA wishes to improve and adapt. By introducing a new category that enables a qualified response, QAA hopes to improve its operations. The results indicate that more than half of respondents are not satisfied that each review met its aims completely. There will be appropriate follow-up to ascertain where improvements can be made.

IQER (Summative reviews only)

3.8   As shown in Table 13, a total of 459 responses were received from a potential sample of 711 people. Table 14 shows stakeholder views regarding achievement of review aim.

Table 13: Review evaluation responses

Respondent group	Questionnaires sent	Number returned
Awarding bodies	234	118
Reviewers	235	190
Facilitators	72	51
Coordinator	85	57
Principal	85	43
Total	711	459

Table 14: Percentage of respondents that agree that the summative review achieved its aim

Respondent group	Per cent agreement
Awarding bodies	79%
Reviewers	99%
Facilitators	98%
Coordinator	97%
Principal	100%

Overall messages from evaluations

3.9   While HEFCE is concerned with providers in England, QAA operates across the UK. It may be useful, therefore, to provide an overview here of evaluation satisfaction across the range of QAA review activities.

Method	Number of reviews	Comments
Institutional Review in England and Northern Ireland	15 (including two private providers)	It is pleasing that many respondents felt that reviews completely met their aims, but with the new approach to questions there is also opportunity to improve by trying to establish reasons why some respondents felt that reviews had partially met their aims. N = 88
Institutional review Wales	3	All respondents indicated that the activity met its aim. N = 13
IQER SRs	83	94% of respondents indicated that the activity met its aim, 5% stated that they 'did not know'. N = 470
IQER NI Des	3	All but two of the respondents indicated that the activity met its aim. The two indicated that they 'did not know'. N = 15
GOsC	2	Data not collected.
Educational Oversight (all types)	105	95% of respondents indicated that the activity met its aim, 4% stated that they 'did not know'. N = 308

Impact

3.10   Table 15 provides major examples of impact arising from QAA review and related processes, and these have been divided into structural and operational changes.

Table 15: Examples of structural and operational changes arising from QAA review and related processes.

Examples of structural changes	Examples of operational changes
Overhauls of committee structures to ensure full responsibilities of boards can be exercised	Improved attendance of internal examiners at boards of examiners

Adoption and implementation of formal policies for assessment, for the annual monitoring of taught courses and for dealing with external examiners' reports	More effective data monitoring systems
adoption and implementation of policies and procedures relating to course validation, periodic review and extenuating circumstances	credit framework implementation, assignment of credit levels to modules and the publication of these
Student involvement incorporated into validation and review procedures	Criteria for the appointment of external academic advisers revised
Improvements to processes, regulations and resources relating to strategic oversight and overall management of collaborative provision	Roles of external examiners revised to improve the value of externality in regard to quality
Introduction of systems for internal review, identification and dissemination of good practice, the encouragement of innovation, and the assurance of the quality of provision	Procedures for confirmation that programme teams have met final conditions for validation and revalidation revised
Policies developed and revised to increase student engagement	Improved monitoring and reporting on the Learner Journey, from application and entry, through to progression, final awards and careers
Revised strategies and policies on staff development	Improved engagement of external stakeholders including employers and students, including participation at institutional level committees
Revision of teaching and learning strategies and policies	Restructuring of policies, procedures and operations relating to learning resources to improve provision, including improved learning support for international students
Systemic changes to ensure greater consistency in the criteria for progression and the award of qualifications	Revised and more systemic processes for sharing good practice

Annex 2: Transnational education (TNE)

1.1   Part of QAA's work includes reviewing the provision of courses outside the UK that lead to UK awards - TNE. QAA is currently carrying out a review of UK TNE in China, which involved a visit to China in November 2012. TNE may take a variety of forms and include partnership arrangements, education provided at branch campuses and arrangements for online or distance learning. The review has been restricted to mainland China and does not include Hong Kong or Macau.

The format for the review has developed from the process of overseas audit, which has been undertaken by QAA for a number of years, each audit focusing on a target country. Recently QAA has looked at Singapore (2011), Malaysia (2010) and India (2009). The reports following previous overseas visits are published on QAA's website at www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/overseas/Pages/default.aspx.

1.2   In preparation for the current review, QAA collected information from UK universities and colleges about their TNE activity in China. The review method involved desk-based studies covering a large proportion of institutions' activity in China, centring on institutional procedures and the way in which they are operated, supplemented by visits to a sample of links in China, centring on the student experience.

1.3   The method comprises four key stages.

- Analysis of TNE in China, based on data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency, public information and survey results.
- Desk-based studies, drawing on standard information sets from universities and colleges.
- A visit to China to sample links, with review team visits to institutions.
- Report (overview, individual review reports and case studies).

1.4   The desk-based studies have the capability of uncovering issues concerned with the management of academic standards and quality in the context of an institution's activities overseas. The visits to links in China have been chosen in order to reflect a cross-section of the overall variety of UK institutions' TNE activity, and were undertaken by a team of senior staff from UK universities and colleges and by staff from QAA. Colleagues from the China Academic Degrees and Graduate Education Development Center (CDGDC), QAA's Chinese Ministry of Education partner, joined the visits in the capacity of observer.

1.5   Following the review visit to China, QAA will produce a report giving an overview of UK TNE in China, together with individual reports on particular UK universities or colleges and their links in China, focusing on the standards of their awards and the quality of the education provided.

HEADLINES FROM THE QAA MAY 2011 SURVEY

165 HEIs surveyed

69 HEIs active in China (Note: of the 69, 46 have articulation arrangements and of these 24 have articulation as their only activity.)

16 provinces where there is activity

5 HEIs account for 90 per cent of activity (Oxford Brookes, Nottingham, Liverpool and Central Lancashire)

34,000 students study through UK TNE in China, 77 per cent of which study Business and Management

Annex 3: The UK Quality Code for Higher Education

Introduction

1.1   The UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) was launched in December 2011. Since then QAA has been engaged in an intensive programme of consultation, revision and updating to ensure that all Chapters reflect the current and future needs of the UK sector. This programme will be completed on 31 October 2013 with publication of the final group of Chapters, including all of Part A.

1.2   The Quality Code is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk/qualitycode.

1.3   The following Chapters were published on schedule in 2012:

Title	Date of publication	New or revised
Chapter B7: External examining	October 2011	Revised
Part C: Information about higher education provision	March 2012	New
Chapter B11: Research degrees	June 2012	Revised
Chapter B5: Student engagement	June 2012	New

1.4   Consultation also commenced on *Chapter B3: Learning and teaching* during this period.

Summary of consultations for each Chapter

2.1   The development of each Chapter, whether new or the revision of an existing version, involves three key elements: the input of an expert advisory group; consultation events and meetings with specialist groups; and open invitation to any individual or organisation to provide a written submission. The consultation period in each case being no fewer than eight weeks.

2.2   Each Chapter has been developed with the support of an Advisory Group, membership of which comprised staff and students or student representatives from higher education providers representative of the sector and the four nations and with expertise in the subject matter covered in the chapter. Membership of each group is detailed in an annex to each Chapter.

2.3   To begin the process of developing the new Chapter on student engagement a scoping event was held on 18 November 2011 in London; this brought together over 100 staff and students, and facilitated the sharing of experience and good practice from across the sector. The outputs from the event influenced subsequent discussions held with the Advisory Group on the development of the Chapter.

2.4   For each Chapter the relevant advisory group met twice before the consultation period opened, and once after it closed, to consider changes required and to agree the final version (subject to editing). Members of the Quality Code Steering Group[1] have also been consulted, and provided valuable comments at the draft and final stages for each Chapter.

2.5   Consultation events were also held for each Chapter, open to staff and students of higher education providers. Where possible, events were held in each of the four nations. An important feature of the events was the involvement of members of the advisory groups, enabling them to hear the discussions between delegates and for delegates to find out more about the discussions which had taken place in the advisory groups leading up to the publication of the consultation drafts.

2.6   The following indicates the consultation events held in 2012 and the number of delegates attending:

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[1] The Steering Group is made up of representatives from higher education sector bodies across the UK.

Chapter	Date	Location	Number of delegates
Part C: Information about higher education provision	18 Jan 12	Glasgow	30
	20 Jan 12	Birmingham	102
	25 Jan 12	Belfast	19
	30 Jan 12	Cardiff	88
	8 Feb 12	London	26
Part C total			**265**
Chapter B11: Research degrees	27 Feb 12	London	86
	14 Mar 12	Glasgow	20
B11 total			**106**
Chapter B5: Student engagement	15 Mar 12	Glasgow	18
	16 Mar 12	London	91
B5 total			**109**
Chapter B3: Learning and teaching	8 Jun 12	Belfast	20
	15 Jun 12	Edinburgh	40
	21 Jun 12	Cardiff	60
	11 Jul 12	Birmingham	95
B3 total			**215**

2.7   The following number of written responses were received for each chapter:

Title	Number of responses
Part C: Information about higher education provision	143
Chapter B11: Research degrees	143
Chapter B5: Student engagement	146
Chapter B3: Learning and teaching	128
Total	**560**

2.8   In addition to events for each Chapter, QAA officers have met with a range of representative and specialist groups and attended relevant events to promote discussion and feedback, including:

- Academic Registrars Council Quality Practitioners Group
- SEDA (Staff Educational Development Association)
- Higher Education Development Community
- ALDinHE (Association for Learning Development in Higher Education)
- UCISA (Universities and Colleges Information Systems Association)
- SCONUL (Society of College, National and University Libraries)
- Northern Universities Consortium
- Scottish Enhancement Themes Conference

- NUS Student Engagement Festival
- SPA Conference
- a group of student ambassadors at a university applicants' open day.

2.9   As part of the commitment to ensuring the effective integration of equality and diversity throughout the Quality Code, QAA is working closely with the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU), including by appointing ECU nominees to the advisory groups.

Changes arising from the consultation processes

3.1   While QAA remains responsible for the final text, the content and in particular the wording of the Expectations and the Indicators of sound practice, were in each Chapter significantly influenced by the views expressed through the consultation processes (events and written responses) and by the detailed consideration by members of the advisory group (at meetings and electronically between meetings). A comparison of the draft versions published for consultation and the final versions demonstrates that changes were made in each case (bearing in mind that some responses provided contradictory views on certain issues).

The influence of consultation on the details of published chapters - a sample:

Chapter B3: Learning and teaching

Wording of the Expectation ending in 'become an active and independent learner' changed to 'to develop as an independent learner, study their chosen subject(s) in depth and enhance their capacity for analytical, critical and creative thinking'.

Chapter B5: Student engagement

Concerns about the use of the word 'partnership' addressed including through additional text explaining the use and interpretation of the word in the chapter (and subsequent application of this approach in *Chapter B3: Learning and teaching*).

Part C: Information about higher education provision

The inclusion of the word 'trustworthy' in the Expectation

Draft Indicator 2 (relating to public availability of policies and procedures) deleted.

Evaluation of the consultation process

4.1   For each Chapter feedback has been sought from delegates attending each of the consultation events, primarily through a paper questionnaire completed at the end of each event. Feedback was designed to ensure that the format and coverage of each event was in keeping with the expectations of delegates as well as indicating the appropriateness or otherwise of the venue. The questionnaires were also used as a means to alert delegates to upcoming events and to provide them with opportunities to indicate other areas of interest.

Launching Chapters of the Quality Code

5.1   For the first time QAA held an event to launch elements of the Quality Code, through an event to mark the publication of *Chapter B3: Learning and teaching* and *Chapter B5: Student engagement*. Held in Manchester on 7 November 2012, this provided an opportunity to draw together themes common to the two Chapters, and to facilitate the sharing of practice between delegates through a 'global cafe' style session.

5.2   The success of this event suggests that there will be value in similar events, in particular where two or more Chapters can be brought together highlighting common themes.

Annex 4: Enhancement activities

Research, Development and Partnerships Group

1.1   QAA's Development and Enhancement Group was re-structured to form the Research, Development and Partnerships Group in March 2011. The Research, Development and Partnerships Group encompasses the functions of the former Development and Enhancement Group, Information Unit and International Collaboration Team.

1.2   The Group is responsible for developing, maintaining and promoting the Quality Code (formerly known as the Academic Infrastructure)[2]; identifying and disseminating good practice and other forms of enhancement; maximising the use made of QAA's data and information; carrying out and commissioning research; and developing, maintaining and drawing upon partnerships to increase the impact of QAA's work both in the UK and internationally.

Driving improvements

2.1   QAA funded research into the academic student experience as part of a suite of collaborative projects with the NUS launched in September 2011. Four reports were published in 2012, on a range of topics[3]. These reports offer valuable insights into student's academic experiences and add to data collected as part of NUS's annual student experience surveys carried out over the last few years. In 2012-13, we will be offering grant funding to individuals or organisations via open competition for research into practices in relation to the *Chapter B5: Student engagement* of the Quality Code, and student perceptions of quality and standards.

2.2   We are currently funding, jointly with the Higher Education Academy (HEA), a team at Oxford Brookes University to carry out research into aspects of external examining, specifically into the standards that are used by external examiners. The work is expected to report by the end of 2013.

2.3   As part of QAA's follow-on work from the research undertaken into concerns around quality and standards which reported in April 2009, we published guidance for institutions and students on contact hours (in August 2011) and on managing international students' experiences (in January 2012). Recommendations in the original report around external examining were taken forward via a combination of revision of the relevant Chapter of the Quality Code, developmental events held jointly with the HEA, and commissioned research which has yet to report. Recommendations relating to public information about higher education were taken into account in developing a new Chapter of the Quality Code on published information.

2.4   Other areas of development and enhancement activity include enterprise and entrepreneurship education, education for sustainable development, doctoral degrees, and recognising achievement beyond the curriculum.

2.5   In the context of growing our research activity, we convened an external Research Steering Group which will meet for the first time in 2012-13 and an internal Research Policy

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[2] The Quality Code was launched on 21 December 2011, replacing the former Academic Infrastructure. The Quality Code encompasses the former Code of Practice, subject benchmark statements, frameworks for higher education qualifications, and guidelines for producing programme specifications.
[3] Part 1: Teaching and learning; Part 2: Independent learning and contact hours; Part 3: Subject differences and Part 4: First year student experience

Group. These groups will assist with setting the strategic direction of QAA's research activity and research governance matters, respectively.

2.6   In September 2011, QAA acquired the Higher Education Empirical Research (HEER) database from the former Centre for Higher Education Research and Information at the Open University. During 2011-12 we have been engaged in developing a new site from which to run the database[4]. The database provides easy-to-digest summaries of the latest higher education research published in journals and by policy institutes, funders and other higher education organisations. At the point at which QAA acquired HEER, it had been active for over 10 years; we hope to continue to build on this activity which facilitates the development of evidence-informed policy and practice.

Sharing practice

3.1   The formation of the Research, Development and Partnerships Group created an opportunity for QAA to strengthen the ways in which we use and disseminate the results of QAA review activity. A transition period in 2011-12 has meant that we have been simultaneously fulfilling pre-existing commitments and developing new initiatives.

3.2   We published four papers[5] under the *Outcomes from Institutional Audit* series, which completes the set of papers looking at audit findings from 2007-09. We prepared a further four papers[6] looking at audit findings from 2009-11, for publication in 2012. The publication of these latter papers completes the *Outcomes from Institutional Audit* series, which in 2012-13 will be replaced by new types of output (below).

3.3   We also published two papers[7] in the Outcomes from IQER series based on findings from IQER reports from 2010-11.

3.4   Looking forward, in 2012-13 we will launch a new online resource which will feature good practice and recommendations deriving from QAA reviews. The new facility will be searchable by the 'Learner Journey' theme (cross-referenced to Chapters of the Quality Code), year and type of review. At the time of writing, we intend that the Good Practice Knowledgebase will go live in December 2012. Detailed examples of good practice based on case studies submitted by institutions that have been reviewed will be included. The Recommendations Knowledgebase will go live in February 2013.

3.5   These new resource banks will facilitate sharing of practice between higher education providers, as well as improving access to information on QAA's work for stakeholders. They will also allow us to monitor trends in the pattern of findings from review activity more effectively over time which will help in assessing the 'health' of the sector and the impact of our work.

3.6   During 2011-12 we have also been planning the development of new quarterly 'impact bulletins' which will look at QAA's activity across the four quarters of the operating year. The results will be presented in an easy-to-digest form and will be externally published. It is hoped that these short, accessible digests will be attractive to senior managers and institutional leaders as well as QAA's usual audience of quality professionals.

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[4] The new site launched in October 2012
[5] External involvement in quality management; Managing learning opportunities; Assessment and feedback; and Published information
[6] Assessment and feedback; Student engagement; Postgraduate research students; and Managing arrangements for collaborative provision
[7] On Assessment and the Student voice

Providing expert guidance

4.1   QAA is represented on various national and international working groups and committees. Examples during 2011-12 include: HEFCE consultation to risk-based approaches to quality assurance; Interim Regulatory Partnership Group for England; Project A: *Mapping the HE Funding and Regulatory Landscape*; Project B: *Redesigning the Information Landscape*; KIS Expert Group; Higher Education Better Regulation Group; Higher Education Public Information Steering Group; Quality Assurance System Stakeholder Group; ENQA Working Groups; Burgess Implementation Steering Group; SPA Fair Admissions Task and Finish Group; and Quality in Higher Education Group.

4.2   We have contributed on a regular basis to external consultations and hosted roundtable consultation events in association with our activities. As in previous years, we have accepted invitations to speak at conferences both nationally and internationally.

Working in partnership

5.1   QAA signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Council for Private Education (CPE) in Singapore in April 2012 and a Memorandum of Agreement with the Malaysian Qualifications Agency in the same month.

5.2   We hosted one meeting of the Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Forum which QAA runs jointly with the UK-Inter-professional Group, in December 2011.

5.3   During 2011-12, we have been gathering together a database of subject experts to assist with our work at this level - we anticipate that the contacts will be helpful in the next round of review of the subject benchmark statements.

5.4   In October 2011, we took ownership of legacy activity around the Employer Based Training Scheme run by the former Foundation Degree Forward.

Generating debate

6.1   During 2011-12 we launched a new publication series entitled *Talking about quality* and published three papers under this banner[8]. These papers are authored by external experts invited by QAA to provide an opinion piece on a topic of current interest within higher education, and specifically in relation to quality, standards or the student experience. Talking about quality replaces the former *Quality Matters* series. We explored the use of hosting live web chats to accompany the series with the release of the latest paper.

6.2   In addition to the *Talking about quality* series, QAA features regular podcasts of interviews recorded with external experts either in relation to an area of our work or in relation to an external topic or event. Forty-two podcasts were released during 2011-12.

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[8] Risk and regulation (Oct 11); Changing impact and uses of quality assurance (Jan 12); Student engagement (May 12)

Annex 5: Student engagement

Introduction

1.1   QAA made a commitment in its Strategy 2011-14 to listen and respond to the student voice: one of QAA's four strategic aims is to meet students' needs and be valued by them.

1.2   We have a specific student engagement strategy to support this, with four overarching aims.

- Aim 1: Ensuring that all our activities have a positive impact on the student experience.
- Aim 2: Actively engaging students in shaping and developing quality assurance and enhancement of higher education.
- Aim 3: Communicating effectively with students so that they recognise and are reassured by QAA.
- Aim 4: Promoting the concept of the 'engaged student' as an important driver for quality enhancement in institutions.

1.3   In 2011-12 QAA has worked closely with its partners at NUS, HEFCE, HEA and in the higher education sector to increase the reach and significance of its student engagement activity. Over the course of the year we have seen an estimated increase in individual instances of direct engagement with students in our work of some 117 per cent (from c.450 instances to c.995 instances[9]) on the previous year.

Student Sounding Board

2.1   The Student Sounding Board (SSB) was established in 2009. It provides an opportunity for informed discussions between students, QAA and our Chief Executive and Board around developments in the higher education sector, and for students to share best practice and to input into the work of QAA.

2.2   In 2011-12 the SSB met four times and inputted directly to QAA's work in a number of key areas, including the development of student-facing guidance for review methods and QAA's overarching approach to student engagement. At their final meeting they were invited by HEFCE to contribute to their consultation to a more risk-based approach to quality assurance.

2.3   In feedback 86 per cent of members that responded said they believed the SSB has a positive influence on QAA policy, and anecdotal evidence from members, stakeholders and those present at the meetings suggest that it has been a useful and successful series of meetings.

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[9] Note these statistics are a conservative estimate and do not, for example, include use of our resources, web pages, indirect support and engagement or numbers from student meetings with review teams, or students who engaged the NUS/QAA research project or the NUS/QAA bespoke consultancy projects, or statistics from QAA Scotland.

Student engagement in review methods

5.1   Supporting student engagement in all our review methods is at the heart of our work in student engagement. In 2011-12 we supported over 200 lead student representatives (LSR) in their roles across all our review methods, provided 1-1 support for 11 LSRs going through IRENI, trained 30 student reviewers to take part in our review methods, and over the course of the year some 17 reviews of institutions were undertaken across England and Wales that contained students as members of review teams. Developments of new methods such as RCHE and REO have been heavily informed by the student engagement team.

Research and development activity

4.1   We are committed to informing and developing practice in the area of student engagement and to that end in 2011-12 funded a major student engagement project to be carried out by the National Union of Students (NUS). The project had three strands.

4.2   Strand 1: Research into the student experience. NUS carried out research on the student experience in 2008-11, funded by HSBC. The aim of Strand 1in 2011-12 was to expand on the knowledge gained through the HSBC research and other surveys such as the National Student Survey. The research work encompassed surveys and focus groups with students with over 5000 students replying to the survey and 12 focus groups engaging with over 100 students. As a result of this work four mini reports were published in March/April 2012 which were widely promoted in the sector and received coverage in the education and mainstream press including the THES, Guardian and Times.

4.3   Strand 2: Student Centred Quality. This strand aimed to develop student engagement with quality assurance processes and reviews of higher education institutions. It included the development of a range of training and briefing materials for a wide range of relevant students including materials for course representatives, briefings and support for students' unions who are producing a student written submission (SWS) for a review, and the delivery of two major events: Quality Matters and Quality Still Matters, which had over 250 attendees. The strand also included the initial development of a website called 'Quality Matters' to host these resources.

4.4   Strand 3: Developing quality engagement. This strand aimed to build the capacity of students' unions who do not have a tradition of being involved in quality assurance at their institution to be able to tackle quality issues and become involved in quality assurance processes. The project worked with 16 self-nominated students' unions including small and specialist provision that were looking for help and support to strengthen their quality agenda. They received up to five days of bespoke consultancy support, to help them get more students within their higher education institution involved in quality assurance processes. As a result a report was published highlighting the challenges to effective student engagement and a range of case studies from the participating institutions. This report was widely circulated and promoted to the student union movement.

Communication and events

5.1   We have undertaken a wide range of events and communication activities in relation to our work on student engagement including delivering sessions at NUS events such as SU12, Delivering Change, and HE Zone. We have welcomed over 80 students to our annual conference and have hosted a parliamentary reception on the topic of student

engagement attended by David Willets and a number of MPs. Students were also at the heart of events associated with the development of the Quality Code, with 44 students attending consultation meetings and 11 students on development groups directly involved with the development of the Quality Code. We have also been developing our approach to more effective communication with students with the development of an area of our website aimed specifically at students and the commissioning of a number of animations to help explain quality assurance and student engagement. The impact is evidenced by the doubling of the number of visitors to the student section QAA's website www.qaa.ac.uk/partners/students.

Future directions

6.1   QAA has recently increased its resource dedicated to student engagement (from two full-time employees to three full-time employees) with the appointment of a senior manager with responsibility for this area. Over the coming year the team intend to focus on:

- deepening and extending student engagement in its review methods
- developing mechanisms to deal with a larger volume of reviews
- supporting the student sounding board as it becomes a more formal advisory group to the Board of Directors within the agency
- maximising and evidencing the impact of its work
- commissioning new research to ensure our work is based on robust evidence of student engagement practice
- focussing its externally funded work on activity to build capacity in the sector to support effective student engagement.

Annex 6: Public engagement activities

1.   In 2011-12 QAA has raised its profile through media, events, networking, and using more interactive, user-centred communication channels.

2.   A new corporate website www.qaa.ac.uk was launched in July 2011, with the main aim of focusing attention on public and student audiences. Analysis of web traffic proves its success, with an increase in visitors and a decrease in page views, demonstrating that visitors are able to access information more easily.

3.   Media coverage in 2011-12 increased on 2010-11. Of particular note was the positive coverage achieved through local press channels, and in the international press; for example the International Herald Tribune printed an article following QAA's Annual Conference in June, and in equivalent advertising rates this coverage alone was worth over £44,000.

4.   QAA hosted a Parliamentary reception in May 2012, which was well received and attended by approximately 140 subscribers, students and parliamentarians. Rt Hon David Willetts MP gave a complimentary speech about the value of QAA. Students were central to the success of the parliamentary reception.

5.   QAA's Annual Conference in June 2012 was attended by more than 300 people, the largest number of subscribers ever. Keynote speeches were given by David Willetts and his shadow, Shabana Mahmood MP. Feedback from delegates was very positive. QAA achieved very successful Twitter coverage, appearing as the top UK unpromoted trending topic during David Willetts' speech. The event was also shortlisted by CorpComms Magazine for the 'Best External Event 2012' category.

6.   We developed a full web glossary of terms to improve accessibility of more complicated higher education terminology - terms are glossed on web pages with hyperlinks to easy-to-understand definitions.

7.   QAA's more established social media channels are well accessed. QAAtweets is fully interactive and we currently have over 3400 followers; our films and animations on QAATube have had over 11,400 views to date; and our photos libraries on Flickr are well accessed, especially post-events.

8.   We continue to build our digital communications portfolio to engage with audiences, most recently on blogs, Facebook, Storify and ScoopIt. We launched a LinkedIn discussion group for our Institutional Liaison Scheme in July, and we hosted our first ever live web chat, about student engagement, in June 2012, which tied in with the Annual Conference and publication of a *Talking about quality* paper on the topic. Live chat feedback was very positive: the chat elicited 121 comments from 17 participants, and generated 307 unique page views, showing that a significant number of people followed the discussion.

9.   QAA published three short animations: two about quality assurance and the review process, and one about Access to HE, all of which have been very well received. Requests for re-use prove that they are being used within institutions.

10.   We continue to build web linking arrangements to and from high traffic websites and media outlets used by applicants, students and other public audiences, and web analytics show that our referrals from these sites are increasing.

List of acronyms

AI   Academic infrastructure
BIS   Department for Business, Innovation and Skills
CPE   Council for Private Education, Singapore
ENQA European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
FECs   Further education colleges
GOsC General Osteopathic Council
HE   Higher education
HEA   Higher Education Academy
HEER   Higher Education Empirical Research
HEFCE Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEIs   Higher education institutions
HER   Higher education review
HESA   Higher Education Statistics Authority
IA   Institutional audit
IQER   Integrated quality and enhancement review
IRENI Institutional review in England and Northern Ireland
KPIs   Key performance indicators
NUS   National Union of Students
OU   Open University
QAA   Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
RCHE Review of college higher education
TNE   Transnational education