



# **Review for Educational Oversight: Handbook**

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For reviews taking place from January 2013 onwards**

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## About educational oversight by QAA

Educational oversight by a designated body is a requirement for highly trusted sponsor status. The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) has been recognised as a designated body for higher education providers by the UK Border Agency (UKBA).

The term '**provider**' refers to a range of organisations that deliver higher education programmes to students. Some may operate for profit, others may have charitable status. The providers reviewed through this method are not currently subscribers to QAA.

The process of **review** described in this handbook is called Review for Educational Oversight (REO). It focuses on providers that offer higher education programmes in collaboration with **awarding bodies/organisations**. REO has been developed for organisations seeking educational oversight by QAA. It reflects the core principles of QAA review processes. In line with QAA's mission, reviews are intended in part to contribute to the **enhancement** of UK higher education and to reinforce the reputation of UK higher education worldwide.

In applying for educational oversight, applicants have agreed to come within the scope of the QAA **concerns scheme** (or within the scope of the *Protocol for managing potential risks to quality and academic standards* in Scotland) and to cooperate with any investigations.<sup>1</sup> Providers should be aware that QAA is developing protocols with Ofqual to share with them, as is deemed appropriate, matters of concern regarding the management of quality.

For the purposes of highly trusted sponsor status, only 'confidence' judgements in the management of **academic standards** and management and enhancement of the **quality of learning opportunities** and 'reliance' in **information about learning opportunities** are deemed as acceptable outcomes.

## About QAA

QAA's mission is to safeguard standards and improve the quality of UK higher education.

QAA's aims are to:

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

QAA's values are:

### **Integrity**

We always aim to be fair, objective and honest in our work, basing our judgements on sound evidence.

### **Professionalism**

We set high professional standards in everything we do, providing relevant and effective services that are trusted by all with an interest in UK higher education.

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<sup>1</sup> See [www.qaa.ac.uk/complaints/concerns/pages/default.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/complaints/concerns/pages/default.aspx).

### **Accountability**

Through safeguarding standards and driving improvements, we fulfil our responsibilities. We consult on the development of our work and assess its impact, seeking to provide a high level of service and to be responsive to external demands.

### **Openness**

We are open and approachable about the work we do, and how we do it, believing that this encourages trust and confidence. We publish full details of our review methods, as well as our reports on institutions. We are committed to communicating clearly and accessibly about all aspects of our work.

### **Independence**

To fulfil our responsibilities we must be an independent voice in UK higher education, basing our work on expert, objective scrutiny and analysis.

A fuller account of QAA's purposes, values and standards is provided in Annex A.

QAA is committed to evaluating and monitoring its work in an open and reflective manner. It does this within the context of an evaluation policy. For further information, please see the QAA website:

[www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/corporate/policies/documents/evaluation%20policy.pdf](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/corporate/policies/documents/evaluation%20policy.pdf).

## **About this handbook**

This handbook is intended primarily for staff working for those higher education providers applying for educational oversight by QAA, and for REO review teams. It is also intended to provide information and guidance for other staff working for higher education providers and for the providers' awarding bodies/organisations. It is not intended for students (for whom QAA has produced separate guidance).

There is a glossary of terms in Annex K; further information may also be found through the web links listed at the end of Annex K. In addition to this handbook, QAA will provide support for providers and reviewers through briefings and training.

## Section 1: Key features of Review for Educational Oversight

1 Review for Educational Oversight (REO) consists of periodic reviews, an annual return and interim monitoring visits between reviews. This section gives an overview of REO, including its aims, objectives and scope. A more detailed description of how REO works follows in Section 2. The annual return and monitoring process is described in Section 6.

2 REO aims to:

- safeguard **academic standards** and contribute to the **enhancement** of UK higher education
- promote partnership working between providers, their awarding bodies/ organisations and students
- provide information that is useful to applicants, students and other interested parties.

3 REO focuses on:

- how the provider manages **academic standards**
- how the provider manages and enhances the **quality of learning opportunities** provided for students
- the **information about learning opportunities** that the provider is responsible for producing.

It reviews how providers carry out their delegated responsibilities within the context of their agreements with their awarding bodies/organisations. REO assumes that the provider and its awarding bodies/organisations are already managing the provision effectively according to the expectations of the **UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code)**<sup>2</sup> or other relevant external reference points (see Annex I).

4 Providers typically work with a range of **awarding bodies** and/or **awarding organisations**, including higher education institutions. The awarding bodies/organisations retain responsibility for the academic standards of all awards granted in their names and for ensuring that the quality of learning opportunities offered through collaborative arrangements is adequate to enable students to achieve the academic standard required for their awards. All awards reviewed should be validated by either an awarding body (a higher education partner) or an Ofqual-regulated awarding organisation, or must be an Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA)-approved learning partner at either Gold or Platinum level.

5 REO is conducted in an open and mutually respectful way, through discussion with staff and students and by scrutinising documents. Review teams will make **judgements** about the effectiveness of the provider's procedures for managing academic standards, management and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities available to students, and the reliance that can be placed on the information about learning opportunities that the provider produces.

6 QAA will publish a **report** at the end of the review. Working documents related to the review, which are not already in the public domain, are regarded as confidential and will only be disclosed to a third party when QAA believes the release is appropriate to comply with the law.

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<sup>2</sup> For more information, see: [www.qaa.ac.uk/qualitycode](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/qualitycode).

7        Following the first review, providers will submit an **annual return** and may receive **monitoring visits** each year before the next full review. Providers who make commendable progress at the first monitoring visit will be exempt from a monitoring visit the following year, unless they meet specified material changes in circumstances, which would either extend the monitoring visit or trigger a full review. Providers who do not pass the monitoring process may request a full review in order to maintain educational oversight. It is expected that full reviews will take place every **four years**. Section 6 describes the process for the annual return and for monitoring visits.

## Section 2: Review for Educational Oversight - how it works

8 This section provides an overview of REO and describes how it operates. The process is summarised in a timeline at the end of the section.

### Overview

9 The emphasis of REO is on the effectiveness of the provider's procedures for managing its higher education. The review takes full account of the varying roles of awarding bodies/organisations, and is sensitive towards differences in those roles between different providers. REO covers all aspects of a provider's management of its higher education. Each review report is published on the QAA website.

### Review teams

10 QAA appoints all review team members, including a **review coordinator** who will liaise with the provider on behalf of the review team (see Annex G for more information about the role of the coordinator and review team).

11 There will normally be four members of the REO team: the coordinator and **three reviewers**. Providers and awarding bodies/organisations will have the opportunity to check team membership for conflicts of interest. Where a provider has more than 1,000 students and/or more than four awarding bodies/organisations associated with its higher education provision, QAA may consider including an additional reviewer. For providers with fewer than 100 students, the team will normally comprise a coordinator and two reviewers. A **facilitator** - a member of staff nominated by the provider - will act as the key point of contact between the provider and the coordinator both before and during the visit.

12 While individual reviewers may take responsibility for drafting particular sections of the report, the whole team reaches a consensus on the judgements about the management of academic standards, the management and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities, and whether information about learning opportunities is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

### Role of students

13 The review seeks to identify students' views of their education, both before and during the visit. The coordinator is responsible for discussing with the provider methods of obtaining a **student submission**, which is voluntary. The team will also expect the provider's self-evaluation to explain how it ensures that students' views inform the management of its higher education programmes.

14 A student representative will be invited to attend the QAA briefing event, alongside members of college staff. Students will be invited to meet the coordinator at the preparatory meeting, and during the visit the team will meet at least one group of students.

### Key stages of REO

15 The key stages of REO are set out below under three headings:

- preparing for REO
- the review visit
- after the review.

## Preparing for REO

- 16 Before the review visit is scheduled to take place, QAA will do the following.
- Notify the provider and its awarding bodies/organisations of the dates of the review.
  - Invite the provider to attend a briefing. Two members of staff, a student representative and a representative of the awarding bodies/organisations are also invited to the briefing. The briefing will contain further advice and guidance on preparing a self-evaluation and on helping students to prepare a submission.
  - Invite the provider to identify a facilitator no later than 12 weeks before the visit. The facilitator should be a member of staff who has a thorough understanding of the provider's higher education provision. More information about the role of the facilitator is provided in Annex G, and in the glossary in Annex K.

### Self-evaluation

17 The self-evaluation is a key element of the review. It should be submitted to QAA **nine weeks in advance** of the review visit. The self-evaluation should provide an analytical self-reflection on the provider's approach to the management of academic standards, the management and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities, and information about its higher education provision. It should make reference to its agreements with awarding bodies/organisations, and the processes and procedures it has adopted for carrying out these responsibilities. The self-evaluation should cover all aspects of the provider's higher education provision and needs to be fully referenced to supporting evidence. The REO team will carry out a careful analysis of the self-evaluation prior to the review visit. Section 3 of this handbook provides further guidance on the self-evaluation. The briefing will also offer further advice on preparing a self-evaluation.

### Preparatory meeting

18 Four weeks before the review, a preparatory meeting is held at the provider between staff and students, representatives of awarding bodies/organisations (if agreed between the partners), and the coordinator. The purposes of the preparatory meeting are to discuss the arrangements for REO, to develop the agenda for the visit in the light of the provider's self-evaluation (and the student submission if one is made), and to identify further evidence for the provider to make available before and during the visit. It is also an opportunity for the coordinator to meet key staff and student representatives, clarify the process, and provide an opportunity for staff and students to ask questions.

19 An indicative programme for a preparatory meeting is provided in Annex C.

### The review visit

20 The visit by the review team will normally take place over two consecutive days. It is designed to allow reviewers to scrutinise evidence on site, and to meet the provider's staff, students and other stakeholders. Reviewers do not observe teaching, but will consider evidence of how the provider assures the quality of teaching and other learning opportunities. Reviewers are responsible for analysing the evidence, which leads to their judgements. The role of the coordinator is one of leadership and facilitation. The coordinator supports the team in making their evidence-based judgements. Annex D provides an indicative programme for the review visit.

## After the review visit

### Provisional judgements

21 Within a week of the review visit, the review team meets again at an off-site location to agree summaries of evidence and to make provisional judgements about:

- the provider's management of its responsibilities for academic standards
- the provider's management and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities
- whether reliance can or cannot be placed on the information the provider produces for its intended audiences about the learning opportunities it offers.

22 For **academic standards** and the **quality of learning opportunities**, teams will make judgements of **confidence**, **limited confidence** or **no confidence**.

23 A provisional **confidence** judgement will be made where:

- the provider is found to be effective in managing its responsibilities for delivering academic standards
- the prospects for academic standards and quality being maintained at current levels appear sound
- the provider has rigorous mechanisms for the management of its higher education programmes in accordance with the awarding bodies'/organisations' requirements.

24 A provisional **limited confidence** judgement will be made where:

- significant concerns exist about aspects of a provider's current or likely future management and enhancement of quality and/or delivery of the standards of its higher education programmes.

25 A provisional **no confidence** judgement will be made where:

- major concerns exist about significant aspects of a provider's current or likely future capacity to secure and maintain quality and/or deliver standards of its higher education programmes.

26 The team will also reach a judgement on whether or not **information** about learning opportunities that the provider produces for its intended audiences is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. This includes:

- information for the public about the higher education provider
- information for prospective students
- information for current students
- information for students upon completion of their studies
- information for those with responsibility for academic standards and quality.

27 A judgement that **reliance can be placed** on the information the provider produces for its intended audiences about the learning opportunities it offers will be reached where the provider:

- recognises all the information that it is responsible for producing within the area under review
- has effective mechanisms for making sure that the information is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy

- has supplied evidence that this is the case.

28 A judgement that **reliance cannot be placed** on the information the provider produces for its intended audiences about the learning opportunities it offers will be reached where a provider:

- does not recognise all of the information that it is responsible for producing and/or
- does not have effective mechanisms for ensuring that the information is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

29 Judgements will always be made with due reference to the delegated responsibilities from the awarding bodies/organisations to the provider.

30 Further details of the criteria for making judgements are set out in full in the glossary in Annex K. **Differentiated judgements** can be made only where a team regards a provider's management of the standards and/or quality of the programmes of study of one awarding body/organisation to be substantially different from those of others.

31 At the provisional judgement meeting, the team will also identify **good practice** and **recommendations**.

32 Good practice is practice that the REO team regards as making a particularly positive contribution to the provider's management of academic standards and/or academic quality, and which is worthy of wider dissemination within and/or beyond the provider.

33 Recommendations for improving the provider's management of its higher education provision are categorised as **essential**, **advisable** or **desirable**, according to priority.

- **Essential recommendations** refer to issues that the review team believes are currently putting quality and/or standards at risk and hence require urgent corrective action.
- **Advisable recommendations** relate to matters that the review team believes have the potential to put quality and/or standards at risk and hence require preventative corrective action.
- **Desirable recommendations** relate to matters that the review team believes have the potential to enhance quality, build capacity and/or further secure standards.

34 A 'no confidence' judgement will always be accompanied by one or more recommendations graded 'essential'. 'Limited confidence' and 'no reliance' judgements are likely to be accompanied by a number of recommendations graded 'essential' or 'advisable'.

35 The coordinator will inform the provider and its awarding bodies/organisations about the outcome of the provisional judgement meeting in writing within one week of the meeting. The letter will also be copied to UKBA. All judgements, good practice and recommendations remain provisional and confidential until the report is finalised.

36 The provider may request a **second visit** if the review team makes a provisional judgement of 'limited confidence' or 'no confidence' in either the management of academic standards or the management or enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities, or of 'no reliance' on information about learning opportunities. The second visit is at QAA's discretion, and will be considered if:

- the provider identifies relevant evidence, that was in existence at the time of the review visit, that was not made available during the review, and could have a significant bearing on the final judgements
- errors were identified in information about learning opportunities which need to be corrected, but do not indicate systemic problems in the provider's processes for ensuring that the information is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

Should a second visit be agreed, the judgements are finalised at the conclusion of the second visit.<sup>3</sup>

### Draft report

37 The review team is responsible for writing a report of its findings. An early draft of the report provides the focus for the provisional judgement meeting. The next draft sets out the provisional judgements, good practice and recommended actions as described above, together with contextual information and supporting evidence.

38 Four weeks after the end of the visit, the coordinator will send a draft version of the report to the provider and its awarding bodies/organisations for comment. This gives the provider the opportunity to draw the review team's attention to any areas that it regards as inaccurate or incomplete and, if necessary, to submit additional evidence. Review teams will be able to consider only supporting evidence that was available at the time of the review visit. The review team will then decide whether or not any aspect of the report, including the provisional judgements, should be amended in response. When the judgements are finalised, QAA will also inform the provider's awarding bodies/organisations and UKBA.

39 If the review team finds that it has confidence in the provider's ability to manage its responsibilities for academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities, and concludes that reliance can be placed on the information the provider produces about the learning opportunities it offers, the provider will be asked at this stage to produce an **action plan** to accompany the report. If the review team makes a judgement of 'no confidence' or 'limited confidence', or 'no reliance' on the provider's ability to manage its responsibilities, a second visit may be scheduled and the preparation of the action plan will be deferred. Further information on the second visit can be found on the QAA website at [www.qaa.ac.uk/educational-oversight](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/educational-oversight).

### Action plan

40 The action plan describes how the provider intends to take forward the reviewers' findings, and the effectiveness of the action taken will form part of the evidence base for any future review activity, including the annual return and monitoring visit. The plan will also constitute a published record of the provider's commitment to developing its provision. A template for the action plan can be found in Annex E, with further guidance on how to complete it.

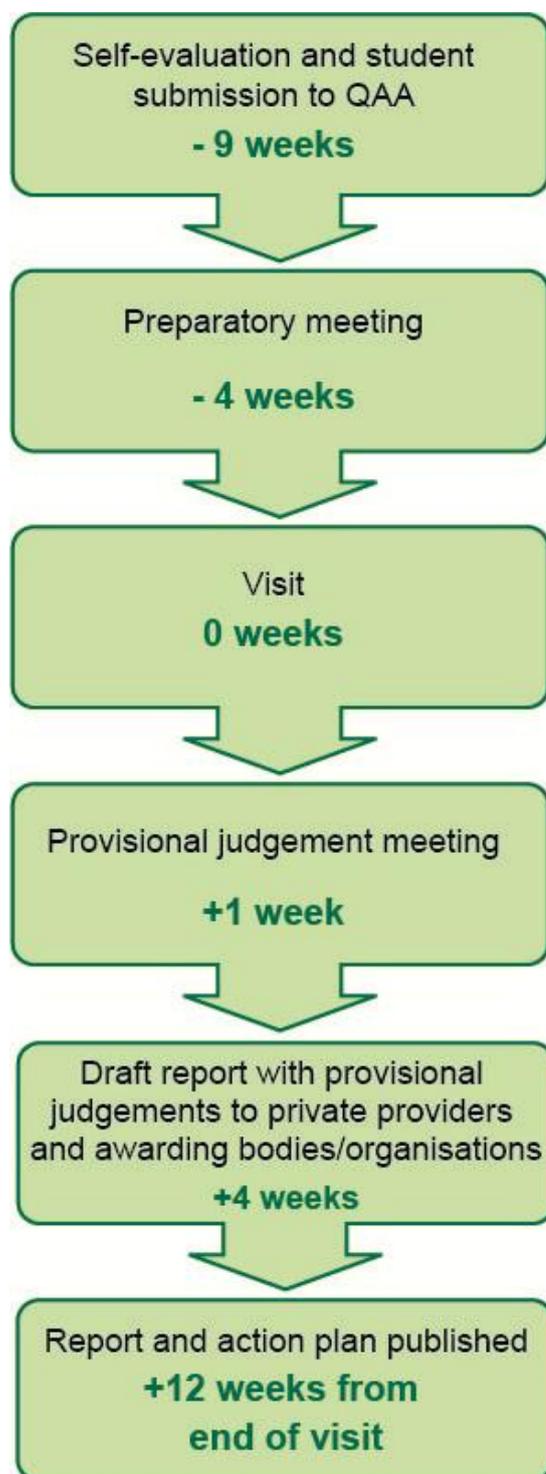
### Final report

41 Normally, once the review team has considered and responded to the provider's comments, it will confirm the judgements. QAA will set out these judgements in writing to the provider and the awarding bodies/organisations. QAA will also send a final version of the report to the provider and its awarding bodies/organisations. The final report will normally be published on the QAA website **12 weeks after the end of the visit**. The final publication date will be deferred if a second visit takes place, or if a provider appeals against the review team's confirmed judgements.

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<sup>3</sup> Details about second visits are published separately: [www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/tier-4/Pages/guidance.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/tier-4/Pages/guidance.aspx). Please note that an additional fee is payable for second visits.

Figure 1: Key stages of a review



**Table 1: Indicative timeline for a review with a single visit** <sup>4</sup>

Time +/- visit (in weeks)	Actions required
<b>Preparation</b>	
-13 (minimum)	<p><b>QAA</b> notifies the provider of the proposed date for the visit.  <b>QAA</b> asks the provider to identify the facilitator.  <b>QAA</b> notifies the awarding bodies/organisations of the review of its partner provider.  <b>QAA</b> invites provider, student representative and representative of awarding bodies/organisations to briefing.</p>
-12	<p><b>Provider</b> confirms the facilitator to QAA.  <b>Awarding bodies/organisations</b> respond to the provider about possible involvement in the preparatory meeting with the coordinator.</p>
-11	<p><b>Provider</b> sends copy of agreement(s) with awarding bodies/organisations concerning their participation in the review process to QAA.  <b>Coordinator</b> contacts the provider to discuss the date, agenda and participants of the preparatory meeting and the student submission.  <b>QAA</b> notifies the provider of the review team and the QAA officer responsible for the review.  <b>Provider</b> checks the proposed team for conflicts of interests.  <b>Provider</b> sends details of the proposed review team to awarding bodies/organisations.</p>
-10	<p><b>Provider</b> organises the preparatory meeting and identifies provider participants, including staff and students.  <b>Provider</b> sends details of the proposed preparatory meeting to the awarding bodies/organisations, coordinator and QAA, if this has been agreed in advance.  <b>Provider</b> reports potential conflicts of interest regarding team members to QAA.</p>
<b>Self-evaluation</b>	
-9	<p><b>Provider</b> submits the self-evaluation to QAA together with Annex B of this handbook (responsibilities checklist), and formal partnership agreement(s) with awarding bodies/organisations.  <b>Students</b> forward their (voluntary) submission to QAA.  <b>QAA officer and coordinator</b> scrutinise the provider's self-evaluation, the partnership agreement(s) for higher education awards, and the student submission if provided.  <b>QAA</b> informs the provider whether the self-evaluation is a suitable basis for the review.  <b>QAA officer</b> asks the provider for additional information if it is not a suitable basis for the review.  <b>Review team</b> analyses the self-evaluation and the supporting evidence, and makes suggestions for further evidence and for the programme for the visit.  <b>Coordinator</b> produces a summary of the team's analysis of the self-evaluation and sends it to the provider and awarding bodies/organisations as a basis for discussion at the preparatory meeting.</p>

<sup>4</sup> Please note that timings may be altered to take account of Christmas and Easter holidays.

Preparatory meeting	
-4	<b>Coordinator</b> chairs the preparatory meeting with the provider. <b>Awarding bodies/organisations</b> attend, if this has been agreed in advance with the provider (during week -12).
-3	<b>Coordinator</b> sends the provider, its awarding bodies/organisations, the review team and QAA a letter confirming the arrangements for the visit. <b>Coordinator</b> sends a briefing note and allocates areas of responsibility to each review team member.
-1	<b>Provider</b> assembles evidence in accordance with the team's requirements.
Review visit	
0	<b>Coordinator</b> leads/chairs the review visit. <b>Review team</b> conducts the visit. <b>Provider</b> takes part in the review visit. <b>Awarding bodies/organisations</b> take part in the review visit, in accordance with agreements with the provider made in advance (during week -12). <b>Facilitator</b> liaises with the review team on behalf of the provider. <b>Coordinator</b> offers an oral update on the progress of the review to the provider's facilitator at the end of the visit.
Provisional judgement meeting	
+1	<b>Coordinator</b> chairs the provisional judgement meeting with the review team. <b>Review team</b> agrees summaries of evidence, provisional judgements, good practice and recommendations. <b>Coordinator</b> sends a letter, setting out the provisional judgements, to the provider, copied to the awarding bodies/organisations. QAA will also send a copy of the letter to UKBA.
Report writing	
+1	<b>Review team</b> drafts report text. <b>Coordinator</b> collates and edits the text and sends the first draft report to the review team for comment and to QAA for editing.
+2 to +3	<b>Review team</b> comments on draft one of the report. <b>Coordinator</b> prepares draft two of the report and submits it to QAA.
Draft report to the provider	
+4	<b>Coordinator</b> sends draft three of the report to the head of the provider and to the awarding bodies/organisations for comments and, if necessary, for the provision of further evidence. This report draft includes the action plan template. <b>Provider</b> checks the draft report for factual accuracy and identifies any additional evidence it needs to submit. <b>Provider</b> liaises with relevant staff to discuss and develop the action plan.
+5	<b>Awarding bodies/organisations</b> send any comment(s) on draft report to the provider to collate into one response to the coordinator.
+6	<b>Provider</b> collates all comments on the draft report, including those from the awarding bodies/organisations, and sends one set of comments on factual accuracy to QAA, providing additional evidence if appropriate.

+7	<p><b>Coordinator and review team</b> consider the provider's comments (and those of its awarding bodies/organisations) and any further evidence submitted.</p> <p><b>Coordinator</b> confirms judgements and finalises draft four.</p> <p><b>QAA</b> confirms by letter to the provider, its awarding bodies/organisations and UKBA, either that final judgements of 'confidence' and 'reliance' have been reached <b>or</b> that a second visit is to take place.</p>
+8 to +9	<p>If no second visit takes place:</p> <p><b>Awarding bodies/organisations</b> contribute to the development of the action plan, if this has been agreed in advance with the provider.</p> <p><b>Provider</b> returns the completed action plan to QAA.</p>
<b>Report publication</b>	
+12	<b>QAA</b> publishes the report on its website.

## Section 3: Preparing a self-evaluation

42 **Self-evaluation** is a key feature of all QAA reviews. The self-evaluation should contain an evaluative, self-critical commentary and **supporting evidence**.

43 The self-evaluation is a fundamental part of the review process. Its purpose is to:

- describe the provider's responsibilities for the management of its higher education provision, making reference to its agreements with the awarding bodies/organisations
- provide the opportunity for analytical self-reflection on the effectiveness of the processes and procedures the provider has adopted for discharging these responsibilities.

44 In simple terms, the self-evaluation explains:

- what the provider is doing
- why the provider is doing it
- how the provider is doing it
- how the provider knows that what it is doing works
- how the provider can improve what it is doing.

45 An effective self-evaluation is key to the provider gaining substantial benefit from REO and to the smooth running of the review. QAA therefore encourages providers to give due time and attention to preparing this document. The preparation of a self-evaluation is a major focus of the briefing that QAA will arrange for providers and their awarding bodies/organisations.

46 The self-evaluation should not involve the production of significant amounts of new material; all the evidence should be readily available and not specially written for the review. In managing their higher education provision, providers will have a range of policies, supported by procedures for implementing them and evidence that they are being carried out. Providers will also have processes for evaluating the effectiveness of these policies and procedures.

### Scope

47 REO addresses all aspects of the provider's management of its higher education provision, and the self-evaluation should reflect this. It should therefore take the form of a portfolio of existing documents accompanied by a short commentary that signposts and contextualises the evidence contained within them and reflects on the effectiveness of processes and procedures. The portfolio should, as far as possible, describe the provider's responsibilities, processes and procedures and give evidence for how they work. It may also include the provider's quality improvement plan. Further guidance on the composition of this portfolio is provided in Table 2 (page 16).

### Structure

48 The self-evaluation should be structured in the following way:

- introduction and context
- analysis of management of academic standards
- analysis of management and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities

- analysis of management of information about learning opportunities
- evaluative summary
- list of evidence
- copies of Annex B (responsibilities checklists).

49 The introduction should provide details of any agreements with awarding bodies. It is important to briefly describe the responsibilities that the agreement with the provider's awarding bodies have conferred upon it and explain the processes and procedures that it has adopted for discharging them. The summary should identify strengths and areas for development, indicating what the provider is doing to enhance its provision. The responsibilities checklist (see Annex B), completed separately for each awarding body/organisation the provider works with, should be submitted with the self-evaluation.

## Content

50 The self-evaluation should identify areas that will help the provider to develop its higher education provision for the benefit of its students. Providers should give careful consideration to ensuring that the management of academic standards, the management and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities and information about learning opportunities can be addressed adequately by the review. The self-evaluation must provide sufficient evidence for the review team to evaluate the effectiveness of the provider's management of its higher education provision.

51 For reviews of provision located on the frameworks for higher education qualifications, the main points of reference for assisting in developing the self-evaluation are contained within the Quality Code. For qualifications on the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF)/National Qualifications Framework (NQF)/Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW)/Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), the other external reference points as identified by the provider will be used. The review team will be interested to see examples that demonstrate how effective the provider's processes are in identifying areas for enhancing the experience of students.

52 The length of the self-evaluation depends on the provider's level of responsibility and the quality and comprehensiveness of existing written evidence.

53 Table 2 is intended to give providers guidance on the structure and content of the self-evaluation. It should not be regarded as prescriptive, since providers have different responsibilities reflecting individual agreements with awarding bodies/organisations. QAA does not publish exemplars of such documents.

**Table 2: Indicative structure of a self-evaluation for REO**

Sections	Suggested content (commentary)	Possible sources of evidence or references (portfolio)
1 Introduction and context	<p>Brief contextual information on the provider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• history, location, number of campuses, total enrolments, total higher education enrolments and a breakdown of full and part-time higher education enrolments, spread of provision across campuses, student numbers, staff supporting higher education (headcount and full-time equivalents), management structure.</li> </ul> <p>Partnership agreements, memoranda of understanding or equivalent with the awarding bodies/organisations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• include summary of key characteristics of each partnership agreement and the arrangements with other awarding bodies; note any significant recent changes.</li> </ul> <p>Recent developments in higher education at the provider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• include summary of any recent developments, such as new building work, expansion or decrease in provision, significant changes to the academic structure and/or staffing.</li> </ul> <p>Students' contribution to the review, including the submission:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• outline whether students sent QAA a submission and, if so, how it was prepared; for example, mention any facilities or guidance given by the provider to the student representatives.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• mission statement</li> <li>• prospectus</li> <li>• organisational diagrams and quality management processes</li> <li>• retention, achievement and progression data tables (normally three years of figures)</li> <li>• higher education annual monitoring reports</li> <li>• provider's strategic plan</li> <li>• internal self-evaluations</li> <li>• partnership agreements with higher education institution(s) and/or awarding organisations</li> </ul>
2 Analysis and evaluation of how higher education is managed	<p><b>Management of academic standards</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How effectively does the provider fulfil its responsibilities for the management of academic standards?</li> <li>• How effectively are external</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• quality assurance policy and manual</li> <li>• monitoring and review processes</li> <li>• admissions policy</li> <li>• accreditation of prior learning</li> </ul>

	<p>reference points used in the management of academic standards?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does the provider use external moderation, verification or examining to assure academic standards?</li> </ul>	<p>policy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• student assessment policy</li> <li>• management structure</li> <li>• deliberative meeting structure</li> <li>• internal validation processes</li> <li>• provider and awarding bodies/organisations' regulations for progression</li> <li>• action taken on receipt of external review or inspection reports</li> <li>• statistical records</li> <li>• programme specifications</li> <li>• student complaints and appeals processes</li> <li>• analyses by provider of student surveys</li> <li>• information for higher education staff</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Management and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How effectively does the provider fulfil its responsibilities for managing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities?</li> <li>• How effectively are external reference points used in the management and enhancement of learning opportunities?</li> <li>• How does the provider assure itself that the quality of teaching and learning is being maintained and enhanced?</li> <li>• How does the provider assure itself that students are supported effectively?</li> <li>• What are the provider's arrangements for staff development to maintain and/or enhance the quality of learning opportunities?</li> <li>• How effectively does the provider ensure that learning resources are accessible to students and sufficient to enable them to achieve the intended learning outcomes?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• quality assurance policy and manual</li> <li>• monitoring and review processes</li> <li>• resource policy</li> <li>• admissions policy</li> <li>• accreditation of prior learning policy</li> <li>• student support and guidance policy</li> <li>• teaching and learning strategy</li> <li>• management structure</li> <li>• meeting structure</li> <li>• staff development policy</li> <li>• staff development records</li> <li>• statistical records</li> <li>• programme specifications</li> <li>• analyses by provider of student surveys</li> <li>• student complaints and appeals procedures</li> </ul>

	<p><b>Information about learning opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How effectively does the provider's information about learning opportunities communicate to students and other stakeholders about the higher education it provides?</li> <li>• How effective are the provider's mechanisms for ensuring that information about learning opportunities is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• publishing policy and procedures for both electronic and paper-based information</li> <li>• notes of meetings discussing scrutiny and approval of information about learning opportunities</li> <li>• promotional material</li> <li>• mission statement</li> <li>• corporate plan</li> <li>• programme specifications</li> <li>• information for prospective students, current students, and for students on completion of their studies</li> <li>• information for those with responsibility for academic standards and quality</li> <li>• information for the public about the education provider</li> </ul>
3 Summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengths.</li> <li>• Areas for development.</li> <li>• Actions being taken currently to improve previously identified areas for development.</li> </ul>	
4 Evidence and references	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Label and number evidence documents.</li> <li>• Provide clear references in the text.</li> </ul>	
5 List of documents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide numbered master list.</li> </ul>	
6 Responsibilities checklist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete one 'responsibilities checklist' (see Annex B) for <b>each</b> awarding body/organisation.</li> </ul>	

### Evaluative commentary

54 The commentary should reflect the provider's capacity for critical self-reflection on the effectiveness of its processes and procedures for managing higher education. A possible approach is to provide an opening statement containing an evaluation then qualify it with supporting evidence, for example:

There is a comprehensive staff development policy (1 Policies: doc 1i) and the provider offers a wide range of staff development activities which are recorded systematically (4 Staff development and training: doc 4ii). Although higher education and further education activities are planned in accordance with the differentiated requirements of both sets of staff, the analysis of the impact of higher education developmental activities on academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities is underdeveloped.

55 Such a statement would typically be followed by a clear indication of what is being done to address an area identified for development, for example:

The provider's Quality Manager and Human Resources Manager are currently reviewing the staff development policy. It will be strengthened by requiring higher education programme managers to conduct an annual evaluation of the impact of staff development and training on the standard and quality of higher education provision. This will serve to improve the planning and sharpen the focus of future events. The revised policy (2 Draft Policies: doc 2i) will be available from the start of the new academic year, supported by training for programme managers and briefings for staff (6 Minutes, Higher Education Development team meeting, 23/07/10, para 2).

## Referencing

56 In order for the team to be able to operate efficiently, both in advance of and during the two days of the review, it is important to ensure that all evidence documents are clearly named and that there is an electronic numbered master list of documents. It is equally important to ensure that each document is clearly referenced to the appropriate text (preferably using hyperlinks) in the self-evaluation, using a consistent naming and numbering system and providing paragraph numbers and dates of minutes as appropriate.

## Drafting

57 The provider may consider circulating the draft self-evaluation to higher education students, staff and awarding body/organisation representatives for comment, as this widens the perspective and helps to keep colleagues informed and engaged in the process. QAA staff, coordinators or reviewers involved in REO may not comment on the draft self-evaluation.

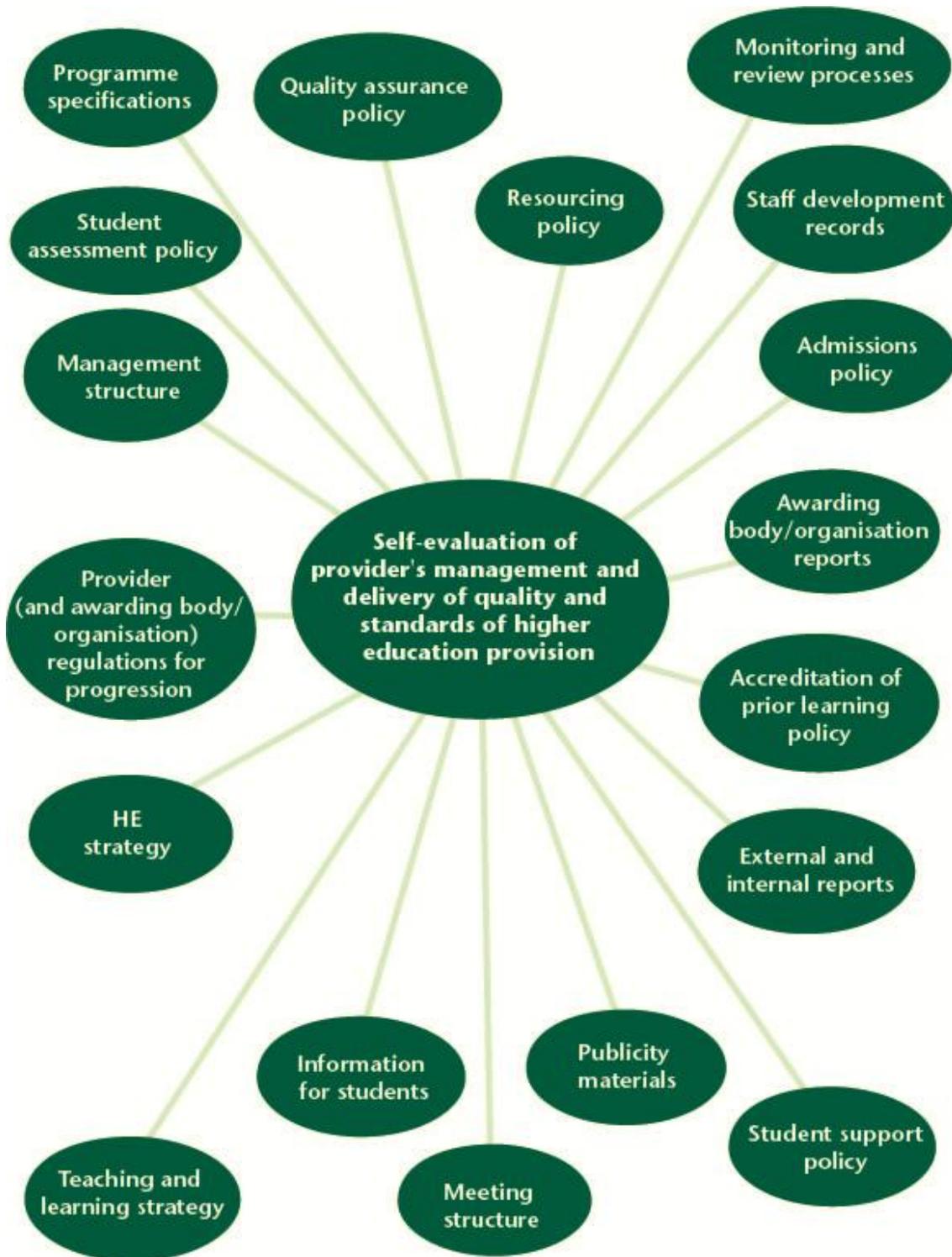
## Submission

58 The self-evaluation should be sent to QAA **nine weeks** before the start of the visit. The coordinator will analyse the self-evaluation and decide, in conjunction with a QAA officer, whether it forms an appropriate basis for the review. When the self-evaluation is approved, QAA will arrange for the review team to receive it. QAA may return the self-evaluation to the provider for further work if it does not enable the team to identify the provider's responsibilities and understand how these are discharged. In these circumstances, the QAA officer will advise the provider.

## Advice on the self-evaluation

59 QAA will hold briefing events for all providers and their awarding bodies/organisations. These events will include advice and guidance on preparing the self-evaluation. Once the coordinators have been appointed, providers should refer to their coordinators for advice. Coordinators may offer guidance on the form and structure of the self-evaluation. They may also advise on the sort of supporting evidence to include. Coordinators will not comment on a draft self-evaluation.

Figure 2: Possible sources of evidence which informs the self-evaluation



## Section 4: Role of awarding bodies and awarding organisations

60 This section provides guidance on how awarding bodies/organisations may be involved in REO. It should be read with reference to the Quality Code, *Part B10: Management of collaborative arrangements*,<sup>5</sup> and in conjunction with the description of the review approach detailed in Section 2. More specific information about the role of higher education institutions is provided in paragraph 66.

61 REO assumes no preferred model for higher education provision, other than that it expects that any model must permit the awarding body/organisation to assure itself about the standards and quality of the higher education provided by its collaborative partners. For further details of a higher education awarding body/organisation's responsibilities for its awards, see the Quality Code, *Part B10: Management of collaborative arrangements*.

62 REO is concerned with the way in which **providers** discharge their responsibilities within the context of their agreements with awarding bodies/organisations. It is not concerned with how awarding bodies/organisations manage their responsibilities for collaborative agreements.

63 To enable awarding bodies and/or awarding organisations to manage their responsibilities for their collaborative arrangements effectively, QAA will make sure that they are notified of any REO of a collaborative partner. Initial REO correspondence between QAA and providers is copied to the heads of the relevant awarding bodies/organisations and/or their nominated contacts. Such correspondence will include confirmation of the dates of any meetings or visits, provisional outcomes of visits and draft reports. In addition, QAA encourages providers to copy all subsequent correspondence from QAA, and any responses to QAA, to their awarding bodies/organisations.

64 Awarding bodies/organisations may also wish to support their partners through REO by assisting, for example, with the preparation of the self-evaluation and by attending various REO events, including review visits. The extent of an awarding body's/organisation's involvement with REO should be decided in discussion between the partners, taking account of the provisions of the partnership agreement and at the discretion of the organisations involved in the collaborative arrangements. The participation of the awarding body/organisation may be considered against:

- the maturity of the relationship between the partners
- the extent of the responsibilities conferred on the provider by the awarding body/organisation
- the accuracy and completeness of existing written evidence about these responsibilities
- the resources available to the awarding body/organisation
- the number of collaborative partners that the awarding body/organisation has.

65 REO teams will be pleased to meet awarding body/organisation representatives at the appropriate stage of the process. QAA will invite awarding bodies/organisations to the briefing, which will provide further guidance on their role. However, awarding bodies/organisations are not required to attend the briefing, or any subsequent events. QAA will not make unreasonable requests for awarding body/organisation involvement in this method, which focuses on the responsibilities of providers. Annex B contains a responsibilities checklist which, once completed, should make clear whether responsibility

<sup>5</sup> Available at [www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/quality-code-B10.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/quality-code-B10.aspx).

for each item is taken by the provider or by the awarding body/organisation. This checklist should be completed and submitted with the self-evaluation.

## **Role of higher education institutions**

66 QAA reviews the responsibilities of higher education institutions within collaborative agreements through the process of Institutional Review. Nevertheless, higher education institutions are important stakeholders in REO for several reasons:

- they are identified in REO reports in association with those programmes which lead to their awards, including those awarded under licence arrangements with Edexcel
- REO reports will be used as a source of evidence for the review of a higher education institution's collaborative provision
- although judgements, recommendations, identified good practice and action plans arising from REO are not addressed to the awarding body, they may have implications for its relationship with its provider partner.

## Section 5: Role of students

67 This section provides guidance for providers on the involvement of students in REO. It should be read in conjunction with the description of the REO method in Section 2.

68 One of the aims of REO is to support providers in reviewing and improving the management of their higher education for the benefit of students. In considering providers' higher education provision, REO teams need to draw on students' views about their experiences as learners. Students are involved in the REO process in two principal ways: the preparation of an optional student submission, and in meetings with the review team.

69 Before a visit, students have the opportunity to produce a student submission, which may take a variety of forms. The principle of the student submission, irrespective of its form, is that it should reflect the students' own views of their experiences as learners.

70 Teams will meet students during REO visits as a matter of course. The arrangements for organising these meetings are covered in Section 2.

71 QAA will provide further guidance to providers on the involvement of students during the briefing and training events in preparation for REO. Separate guidance documentation will be provided for students on QAA's website:  
[www.qaa.ac.uk/partners/students/reviews/pages/REO.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/partners/students/reviews/pages/REO.aspx).

## Section 6: The annual return and monitoring process

### Purpose of the monitoring process

72 The annual return and the monitoring visit are an integral part of the overall review process; they will serve as a short check on the provider's continuing management of academic standards, the management and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities, and the information it produces about learning opportunities. The annual return will be an opportunity to reflect upon developments made in the management of academic standards and quality by the provider since the previous review or monitoring visit, and for QAA to note any matters which will be of particular interest to the team that conducts the provider's next review or monitoring visit.

73 The monitoring process has a developmental aspect, in that it will also serve to support providers in working with the Quality Code. The Quality Code gives all higher education providers a shared starting point for setting, describing and assuring the academic standards of their higher education awards and programmes and the quality of the learning opportunities they provide.

74 Significant changes in circumstances, or complaints or concerns raised about the provider, may trigger a full review instead of a monitoring visit (see paragraphs 94-96).

### Overview of the monitoring process

75 All providers should submit an annual return to QAA, normally **nine months after their previous review or monitoring visit**. QAA will notify providers of the date when the annual return should be submitted.

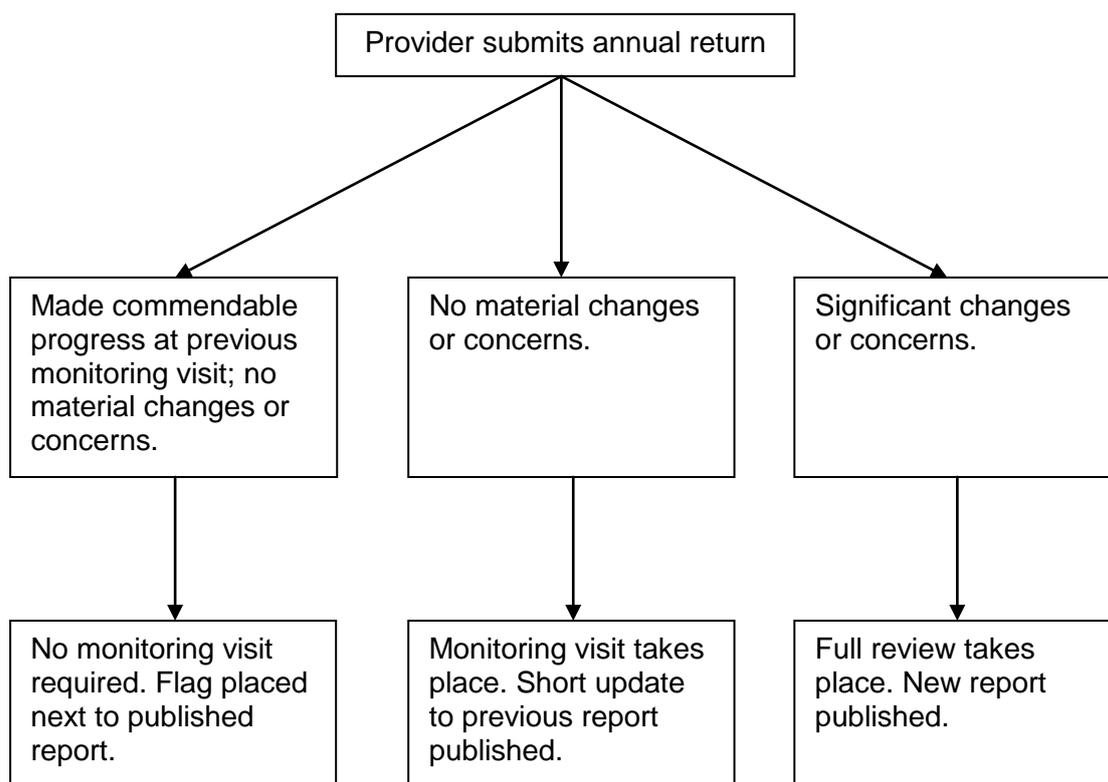
76 Based on the annual return, QAA will determine whether a short monitoring visit or a full review visit is necessary (see Figure 3 and paragraph 87). Providers who make commendable progress in one monitoring visit may not be required to undergo a monitoring visit the following year.

77 The monitoring visit will result in a short update to the published report.<sup>6</sup> If a full review takes place, a new report will be published.

78 The flow chart in Figure 3 outlines the monitoring visit process, which takes place each year between full review visits.

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<sup>6</sup> Where providers do not have a monitoring visit because they exceeded expectations the previous year, this will be flagged on the QAA website.

**Figure 3: flow chart of the monitoring process**

### The annual return

79 The annual return will normally be submitted nine months after the previous QAA visit. However, QAA should be notified immediately of any material changes of circumstances (see paragraphs 94-96 for details of material changes). If a provider does not have a monitoring visit in one year, the annual return will be due one year after the previous return.

80 The annual return should be submitted electronically to QAA. Details will be given to providers on how to do this when they are advised of the date for submission. The template for the annual return can be downloaded from the QAA website at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/REO-annual-return-form.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/REO-annual-return-form.aspx).

81 The provider is required to update QAA on:

- current programmes offered, awarding bodies/organisations and student numbers
- any major strategic or material changes since the last QAA team visit (see paragraphs 94-96)
- actions taken to address the good practice and recommendations in the action plan, or subsequent developments
- actions taken to address any recommendations in other external reports since the REO (such as awarding organisation or professional, statutory or regulatory body reports)
- progress in working with relevant external reference points to meet UK expectations for higher education
- involvement of students in quality assurance processes.

82 The annual return will take the form of a short briefing paper, together with links to key documents that provide evidence of any action taken in response to all previous good practice and recommendations.

83 In the first year following a full REO, the annual return should report in detail on how the provider has effectively implemented the action plan in response to the review report. Providers should supply evidence that the actions have been implemented effectively.

84 Providers should **maintain the action plan on an ongoing basis**, to ensure continual monitoring, review and enhancement of their higher education provision. In subsequent years, the monitoring visit will assess the effectiveness of the provider's actions to support continuous improvement. The annual return is the main mechanism by which the provider can communicate to QAA that it is continuing to evaluate and enhance its management of academic standards and quality.

85 Providers should consider how their quality assurance policies and processes allow them to meet the UK expectations for higher education. Providers should reflect on their use of relevant external reference points, including the Quality Code, in the annual return.

86 Providers should engage students in their quality assurance processes. Students may be involved in implementing the action plan and/or in measuring the outcomes of actions taken. Providers should reflect on the effectiveness of their processes to support student engagement in the annual return.

87 The provider's annual return and supporting evidence will be read by a QAA officer. QAA may decide that a full review visit is required instead of, or following, a monitoring visit if:

- there is evidence that material changes in circumstances have occurred (see paragraphs 94-96)
- there is a lack of demonstrable progress against the published action plan
- QAA has received complaints about academic standards or quality issues that are being investigated through the concerns scheme (see Section 7)
- there are other serious concerns about the provider's ability to effectively maintain academic standards and/or manage and enhance the quality of learning opportunities or the information the provider produces about learning opportunities (see Section 7).

### **The monitoring visit**

88 The monitoring visit will last for one day, and will normally include meetings with the provider's staff and students. Annex J sets out an indicative timetable for a monitoring visit. The monitoring team will normally consist of a review coordinator and one reviewer. The team will produce a short update to the existing report that will comment on:

- any changes since the last review
- the progress that has been made against the good practice and recommendations made in the most recent QAA report for the provider
- progress on working with external reference points to meet UK expectations for higher education
- any matters that should be followed up in the next monitoring visit/review visit
- a conclusion on the progress made in responding to the previous review or monitoring visit.

**Table 3: Indicative timeline for the monitoring process**

<b>Time +/- visit (in weeks)</b>	<b>Actions required</b>
-12 weeks	<b>Provider</b> submits electronic copies of the annual return and supporting evidence to QAA.
-12 weeks	<b>QAA Review Support Officer (RSO)</b> reads the annual return and determines whether a monitoring visit will take place or whether a full review is required. <sup>7</sup>  If the monitoring visit is to take place: <b>QAA administrator</b> confirms the monitoring team to the provider, and agrees the date of the visit. <b>QAA administrator</b> notifies the provider's awarding bodies/ organisations of the visit.
-4 weeks	<b>Monitoring team</b> analyses the annual return and prepares its agenda for the monitoring visit.
-2 weeks	<b>Coordinator</b> agrees the arrangements for the visit with the provider, and copies in the awarding bodies/organisations.
0 weeks	The monitoring visit takes place: <b>monitoring team</b> visits the provider, meets with staff and students, and considers any other evidence provided. (See Annex J for an indicative timetable for a monitoring visit.)
+1 weeks	<b>Monitoring team</b> drafts the update to the report, and <b>coordinator</b> sends it to the QAA RSO for editing.
+2 weeks	<b>QAA RSO</b> edits the update. <b>Coordinator</b> then sends the update to the provider and its awarding bodies/organisations for comment.
+4 weeks	<b>Provider</b> returns comments on factual accuracy to QAA. Comments from awarding bodies/organisations should be incorporated into the provider's comments.
+5 weeks	<b>Coordinator</b> discusses the provider's comments with the reviewer and QAA RSO and makes final amendments to the update.
+6 weeks	<b>QAA</b> publishes the outcome on the QAA website as an addendum to the previous review report.

### Outcomes of the process

89 Conclusions reflect the provider's continuing management of academic standards, management and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities, and the information it produces about learning opportunities. An overall conclusion will be graded as follows:

- the provider is making commendable progress
- the provider is making acceptable progress
- the provider is making progress but further improvement is required
- the provider is not making acceptable progress.

The requirements for meeting each of these grades in the annual monitoring process are defined in Table 4 on page 29.

90 Providers should engage effectively with relevant external reference points, including the Quality Code, to manage their higher education. They should actively engage

<sup>7</sup> If a full review is required, the process will be followed as outlined in the REO handbook. The review cycle will then begin again.

students in quality assurance processes. Monitoring teams may identify good practice, or may make recommendations if providers are not managing these responsibilities effectively.

91 Academic standards and quality must be maintained in order for a provider to pass the monitoring process. Where there is evidence to demonstrate that a provider is making commendable progress (see Table 4), the next monitoring process will take place in two years' time,<sup>8</sup> unless the provider undergoes a material change in circumstances or other concerns are raised about the provider's management of its academic provision.

92 Where action plans have not been implemented fully or have not been effective in all areas, further action will be required to maintain educational oversight.

- Where the provider is **making progress but further improvement is required**, the provider will be required to submit a new action plan within 30 days of the visit. In order to maintain educational oversight, the provider should request a full review to take place within **six months** of publication of the outcome of the monitoring process.
- Where the provider is **not making acceptable progress**, the provider will be required to submit a new action plan within 30 days of the visit. In order to maintain educational oversight, the provider should request a full review to take place within **three months** of the publication of the outcome of the monitoring process.

93 A draft of the monitoring team's findings will be sent to the provider for comment on factual accuracy. The final update will be shared with UKBA and the provider's awarding bodies/organisations, and will be published on the QAA website.

## Significant changes in circumstances

94 Any of the following material changes will automatically trigger a full review in place of the next monitoring visit. The following changes should be reported from the last QAA review or monitoring visit:

- an increase in total student numbers (international and/or domestic) by more than 50 places or 25 per cent, whichever is greater
- merger with another college or acquisition of a new branch that is planned to be included in the existing UKBA sponsorship arrangement
- a change of 50 per cent or more on the type of provision/courses offered, including changes of awarding body/organisation.

95 The following changes will be considered at the next monitoring round, which may mean that the monitoring visit requires additional time, at additional cost:

- change of address, acquisition of a new building, or extension of premises with an increase in capacity by 25 per cent or more
- change of principal and/or proprietor, or equivalent
- change of 20 per cent or more of permanent teaching staff
- change of 30 per cent or more on the type of provision/course offered, including changes of awarding body/organisation.

96 Notification of three or more of these changes will trigger a full review instead of the monitoring visit.

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<sup>8</sup> If a full review is planned for the following year as part of the four-year cycle, this exemption will not apply.

## Conclusions for the REO monitoring process

Teams will draw a conclusion on the progress that has been made by the provider against their action plan and on working with relevant external reference points, following the criteria below. Conclusions reflect the provider's continuing management of academic standards, management and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities, and the information it produces about the learning opportunities it offers.

**Table 4: Monitoring process conclusions**

<b>The provider is making commendable progress</b>	<b>The provider is making acceptable progress</b>	<b>The provider is making progress but further improvement is required</b>	<b>The provider is not making acceptable progress</b>
The provider is making commendable progress in response to the good practice and recommendations of the previous review.	The provider is making acceptable progress in response to the good practice and recommendations of the previous review.	The provider is making progress in response to the good practice and recommendations of the previous review but further improvement is required.	The provider is not making acceptable progress in response to the good practice and recommendations of the previous review.
All actions have been implemented fully and have led to improvements in the provider's management of its higher education.	Most actions have led to improvement. Areas that have not been addressed fully do not have the potential to put academic standards or quality at risk.	Areas that have not been addressed fully or effectively have the potential to put academic standards and/or quality at risk  <b>and/or</b>	Areas that have not been addressed fully or effectively currently put academic standards and/or quality at risk.
The provider demonstrates highly effective engagement with relevant external reference points, including the Quality Code.	The provider demonstrates appropriate engagement with relevant external reference points, including the Quality Code.	the provider demonstrates insufficient engagement with relevant external reference points, including the Quality Code	

Information produced by the provider for its intended audiences about the learning opportunities it offers is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.	Information produced by the provider for its intended audiences about the learning opportunities it offers is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.	<b>and/or</b> improvement is required to ensure information produced by the provider for their intended audiences about the learning opportunities they offer is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.	
<b>Outcome of the monitoring visit</b>			
<b>The provider is making commendable progress</b>	<b>The provider is making acceptable progress</b>	<b>The provider is making progress but further improvement is required</b>	<b>The provider is not making acceptable progress</b>
The provider will not receive a monitoring visit in the following year, if no material changes have taken place which may require a full review. (If a full review is due the following year, there is no exemption.)	The provider will undergo a monitoring visit or full review in the following year.	To maintain educational oversight, the provider must apply for and undergo a full review within six months of the publication of the outcome of the monitoring visit.	To maintain educational oversight, the provider must apply for and undergo a full review within three months of the publication of the outcome of the monitoring visit.

## Section 7: Concerns, complaints and appeals

### Concerns about the standards and quality of higher education

97 QAA investigates concerns about the standards and quality of higher education provision raised by students, staff and other people and organisations, where we think these concerns indicate serious systemic or procedural problems.

98 QAA can investigate concerns about:

- academic standards - the level of achievement a student has to reach in order to achieve a particular award or qualification
- academic quality - everything that a university or college provides to ensure its students have the best possible opportunity to achieve the required standard (this includes teaching, learning resources and academic support)
- the accuracy and completeness of the information institutions produce about their higher education provision.

99 Concerns may be followed up through educational oversight reviews or as a separate process. Further information about the concerns process can be found on the QAA website: [www.qaa.ac.uk/complaints/concerns/pages/default.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/complaints/concerns/pages/default.aspx).

### Complaints and appeals

100 QAA distinguishes between complaints and appeals. A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with services we provide or actions we have taken. If you wish to complain about QAA, please contact Julian Ellis (Head of Concerns) at QAA, in writing. It is helpful if you tell us how you think QAA has erred and what you think we should do in response to your complaint. It is also helpful if you submit evidence to support your complaint, such as correspondence you have had with a member of QAA staff. Further information about complaints can be found on the QAA website at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/complaints/complaints-about-QAA/pages/default.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/complaints/complaints-about-QAA/pages/default.aspx).

101 Appeals are challenges to specific decisions, in specific circumstances. An appeal may be lodged if, and only if, the review team's final judgements are any one of the following:

- no confidence in academic standards
- no confidence in the quality of learning opportunities
- limited confidence in academic standards
- limited confidence in the quality of learning opportunities
- reliance cannot be placed on the information the provider produces for its intended audiences about the learning opportunities it offers.

102 An appeal can be lodged on any the following grounds:

#### 103 Procedure

That the review team failed to carry out agreed procedures, or exceeded its powers, in such way that the legitimacy of the decisions reached are called into question.

104 **Perversity**

That the review team's conclusions were unreasonable or disproportionate in the light of the available evidence. This may be because irrelevant matters were taken into account or relevant matters were not taken into account.

105 **New material**

There is material that was in existence at the time the review team made its decision which, had it been made available before the review had been completed, would have influenced the judgements of the team, and in relation to which there is a good reason for it not having been provided to the review team.

106 For further information about appeals in REO, please see the QAA website:  
[www.qaa.ac.uk/complaints/documents/educational-oversight-procedure-on-appeals.pdf](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/complaints/documents/educational-oversight-procedure-on-appeals.pdf).

## **Annex A: QAA's mission, values and standards**

QAA stands for the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education.

QAA's vision is:

**to be the authority on UK higher education standards and quality.**

QAA's mission is:

**to safeguard standards and improve the quality of UK higher education.**

QAA is committed to:

- the intrinsic worth of higher education
- the entitlements of students
- the public interest in higher education
- the importance of equality and diversity.

### **The intrinsic worth of higher education**

We admire and support the research and teaching that takes place in universities and colleges across the UK. We respect the autonomy of UK universities and colleges, and believe that it fosters the diversity that is central to their success and international reputation. We also recognise that their primary role in maintaining academic standards and quality is vital to that autonomy. We rely upon their cooperation in our work, and in return provide valuable advice and support.

### **The entitlements of students**

All students deserve a high quality learning experience. They have a right to a range of learning opportunities leading to a qualification that has recognised value and meets published national expectations. Students are our partners in quality assurance, and are experts not only on their own learning but also on issues of governance, policy and practice. We seek to harness that expertise in every aspect of our work.

### **The public interest in higher education**

Students, their families and the wider public make a big investment in higher education. As well as helping students meet material aspirations and offering personal fulfilment, higher education enriches our society. We believe the public have a legitimate interest in ensuring standards are safeguarded and quality maintained, and that we have a duty to clearly communicate our work to a wide audience.

### **The importance of equality and diversity**

We believe that equality and diversity should be promoted through the services we provide, and that in our work we should be supportive, fair, just and free from discrimination. The higher education sector should lead the way in valuing the diverse contributions of all its staff, students and partners, and in developing and sharing good practice in this area.

QAA's values are:

**Integrity**

We always aim to be fair, objective and honest in our work, basing our judgements on sound evidence.

**Professionalism**

We set high professional standards in everything we do, providing relevant and effective services that are trusted by all with an interest in UK higher education.

**Accountability**

Through safeguarding standards and driving improvements we fulfil our responsibilities. We consult on the development of our work and assess its impact, seeking to provide a high level of service and to be responsive to external demands.

**Openness**

We are open and approachable about the work we do, and how we do it, believing that this encourages trust and confidence. We publish full details of our review methods, as well as our reports on institutions. We are committed to communicating clearly and accessibly about all aspects of our work.

**Independence**

To fulfil our responsibilities we must be an independent voice in UK higher education, basing our work on expert, objective scrutiny and analysis.

QAA's aims are to:

- meet students' needs and be valued by them
- 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.

More information about QAA is available on our website: [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk).

## Annex B: Responsibilities checklist

One copy of this checklist should be completed for **each** awarding body and awarding organisation and sent to QAA as part of the self-evaluation.

**Provider:**

**Awarding body/organisation:**

Please identify management responsibilities (or responsibilities for implementation within partnership agreements) using the checklist below. Where the provider is fully responsible (implementation is fully devolved) please mark the **provider** column; where the awarding body/organisation has full responsibility, mark the **awarding body/organisation** column; where responsibility is shared or the provider implements under awarding body/organisation direction, mark the **shared** column. Where responsibility is devolved to the provider or shared please give **documentary reference(s)** that show how this is managed or implemented. These may be provided in the self-evaluation portfolio or in documents presented subsequently or available during the visit.

Item	Provider	Awarding body/organisation	Shared	Documentary reference(s)
1 Identification of curriculum needs				
2 Strategic development of higher education				
3 Curriculum development				
4 Programme specifications and intended learning outcomes				
5 Setting assessments				
6 First marking of student assignments				
7 Moderation or second marking of assignments				
8 Giving feedback to students on their assignments				
9 Student recruitment and selection				
10 Monitoring student admission, retention and completion				
11 Reviewing and responding to annual monitoring reviews and module evaluations				
12 Quality review of higher education provision				
13 Provision for developing staff teaching and assessing				

skills at higher education level				
<b>14</b> Provision for staff higher education subject updating and scholarship				
<b>15</b> Monitoring the quality of higher education teaching and learning				
<b>16</b> Student admission guidance and induction				
<b>17</b> Academic tutorial/review and monitoring/academic guidance				
<b>18</b> Library and learning resources available to students				
<b>19</b> Guidance for progression				
<b>20</b> Liaison with and involvement of employers				
<b>21</b> Student appeal system				
<b>22</b> Collecting and acting upon student feedback/opinion				
<b>23</b> Programme and module information available to students				
<b>24</b> Information about learning opportunities, for example, on web or in prospectus				
<b>25</b> Procedures for ensuring that information about learning opportunities is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy				

## Annex C: Indicative programme for a preparatory meeting

The agenda below is indicative and QAA considers it the minimum necessary to enable the provider, its awarding bodies/organisations and the coordinator to establish the requirements of the review. The coordinator, the provider and its awarding bodies/organisations may feel it appropriate to include additional items. In practice, the programme for each provider may vary.

The coordinator should have the opportunity to meet a wider group of staff than those who will be involved directly in the review, such as the facilitator. This typically happens during the early part of the preparatory meeting, although the coordinator will also expect to meet a smaller core team for the detailed planning. The coordinator will also want to hold a separate meeting with students. At the briefing, QAA will give further guidance about who might attend the preparatory meeting.

It is important that providers prepare to discuss each item on the agenda by, for example, ensuring that they have up to date information available at the meeting. The preparatory meeting provides staff with a valuable opportunity to clarify their understanding of the review method.

**Table 5: Indicative programme for a preparatory meeting**

Activity	Suggested participants
Overview of REO: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a standard presentation about the method</li> <li>• clarification of the scope of the review</li> <li>• questions from provider staff</li> <li>• next steps</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• head of the provider or a representative, and relevant members of the senior management team</li> <li>• staff responsible for managing higher education and/or heads of departments or sections providing higher education</li> <li>• other staff who deliver higher education</li> <li>• provider's facilitator</li> <li>• awarding body/organisation representatives, if agreed in advance</li> </ul>
The role of students: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• introductions</li> <li>• purpose of the preparatory meeting</li> <li>• clarification of the REO method</li> <li>• scope of the review</li> <li>• questions from students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• students</li> <li>• students' representatives who may, for example, represent the students on their programme or year, or the higher education students</li> </ul>
Detailed planning, including confirmation of the team's requirements for the visit: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• questions arising from the initial analysis of the self-evaluation</li> <li>• confirmation that the statistical data is correct and accurate</li> <li>• reviewers' requests for information</li> <li>• establishing the programme of review activities</li> <li>• clarification of the availability of evidence, including student work</li> <li>• 'housekeeping' arrangements</li> <li>• remaining questions from provider staff or awarding body/</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provider staff responsible for managing higher education</li> <li>• provider's facilitator</li> <li>• awarding body/organisation representatives, if agreed in advance</li> </ul>

organisation representatives • next steps	
End of meeting	

## Annex D: Indicative programme for a review visit

Indicative programmes for a REO visit are set out below. They are provided here primarily to illustrate the balance between meetings with staff, students and other stakeholders, and the time that teams will spend scrutinising evidence in private. In practice, each visit will have a bespoke programme informed by several factors including the availability of staff and students, the involvement of awarding bodies/organisations and the topics/themes the team wishes to explore. The programme will be discussed at the preparatory meeting and confirmed by the coordinator before the visit.

### Day one

Time	Activity
0845	The team arrives at the provider's premises.
0900	A brief presentation by the provider about its higher education provision.
0915	The team develops a detailed work plan for the visit, including questions for staff and students (team and facilitator).
1030	The team meets relevant staff (to discuss the management of academic standards and relevant aspects of information about academic standards).
1200	The scrutiny of evidence (team only), including working lunch.
1300	The team meets higher education students.
1400	The scrutiny of evidence (team only).
1500	The second meeting with relevant staff (to discuss the management and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities and relevant aspects of information about learning opportunities).
1630	The further scrutiny of evidence (team only).
1730	A team meeting (team and facilitator).
1800	The team departs.

### Day two

Time	Activity
0845	The team arrives at the provider's premises. The further scrutiny of evidence (team only).
1100	The third meeting with relevant staff, to discuss any matters arising from day one.
1200	The further scrutiny of evidence (team only) with working lunch.
1400	The team summarises evidence and confirms that all areas have been addressed (team and facilitator) (there may be an additional meeting with staff to follow up any outstanding issues).
1600	The coordinator, with the support of the team, gives an oral update to the facilitator and the provider contact on the progress of the review and the need for any additional evidence.
1630	End of visit. The team departs.

## Annex E: Guidance notes on completing the action plan

Following a review, the provider should develop an action plan to a QAA template. The action plan should identify how the provider will take action on the findings of the review. The template for the action plan can be found in Table 7 at the end of this annex.

The action plan forms part of the final published version of the report. It is important, therefore, that the action plan is completed by the provider in consultation with its awarding bodies/organisations and signed off by the head of the provider. It should be completed and returned to QAA by the given deadline.

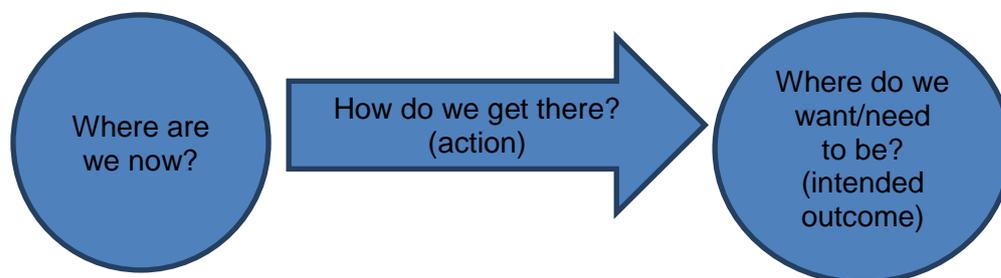
The action plan, its implementation and its impact will form part of the evidence base for any future annual monitoring or review activity. It will also constitute a published record of the provider's commitment to take forward the findings of REO.

**Table 6: Deadlines for completion of action plans**

Number of weeks after the visit	Action
+4	The provider receives the draft report and action plan template.
+4 to +8	The provider liaises with relevant staff to develop the action plan. The awarding bodies/organisations contribute to the development of the action plan, if this has been agreed in advance with the provider.
+9	<b>The provider returns the completed action plan to QAA, signed by the head of the provider.</b>
+10	QAA appends the completed action plan to the final report and proofreads the document.
+12	QAA publishes the final report, with the completed action plan, on its website.

### Completing the action plan

Before completing the action plan template, it might be useful to consider beginning with the end in mind. What are the intended outcomes? What will be different as a result of the actions taken?



**Figure 4: Completing the action plan**

For example:

Recommendation	Intended outcomes
Formalise and enhance the current arrangements for the central recording and tracking of internal verification of assessment	<p>Fully embedded formal policy on internal verification.</p> <p>All staff competently follow the policy and procedures and use the tracking logs to provide evidence of successful internal verification of assessment.</p> <p>External verifier reports comment on an effective internal verification system</p>

Actions can then be developed that will lead to the intended outcomes being achieved.

### General considerations on the action plan

It may be helpful to consider the following points.

- Do the actions provide a sufficient framework for the provider to move forward in a structured way?
- Can progress be monitored and evaluated?
- Does the action plan show someone external to the provider what evidence could be used to confirm that the actions have been achieved and their effectiveness evaluated?

The column headings in the action plan template are:

#### Column 1: Good practice and recommendations

This column is completed by the coordinator and repeats precisely the wording of the good practice and/or recommendations identified in the Key findings section of the report.

#### The following columns are completed by the provider in conjunction with its awarding bodies/organisations:

##### Column 2: Intended outcomes

State the outcomes that will be achieved in response to the good practice and recommendations. Outcomes for good practice should involve wider dissemination and/or enhancement. Outcomes for recommendations should show improvement. The provider's responsibilities to its awarding bodies/organisations should be considered when developing the intended outcomes.

It may be helpful to consider the following questions.

- What will be different as a result of the action(s) taken?
- What will success look like?
- How can success be measured?

Examples:

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Intended outcomes</b>
Ensure that formal committees have appropriate powers and membership, and record and disseminate their actions and outcomes systematically	<p>Successful implementation of formal committees and formal meeting minutes.</p> <p>All academic committee minutes (including faculty committees and student forums) show that all action points are reported and tracked until completed and closed.</p>
Ensure that staff receive appropriate training and guidance to enable them to effectively identify and address instances of plagiarism	<p>Successful implementation of anti-plagiarism training for all staff.</p> <p>Plagiarism detection software effectively used to identify and reduce instances of plagiarism.</p> <p>Internal verification process evidences instances of and responses to plagiarism in student work.</p>

### **Column 3: Actions to be taken to achieve intended outcomes**

Each point of good practice and each recommendation must be accompanied by at least one action. Each action should be 'SMART' (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound).

Each action must be specific and detailed. Actions such as 'maintain', 'enhance' or 'continue' are difficult to complete and evaluate effectively and should be avoided.

The actions should allow the provider to achieve the intended outcomes. It is possible that several actions may be needed. Multiple actions may be used as milestones.

Examples:

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Intended outcomes</b>	<b>Actions to be taken to achieve intended outcomes</b>
Ensure that formal committees have appropriate powers and membership, and record and disseminate their actions and outcomes systematically	<p>Successful implementation of formal committees and formal meeting minutes.</p> <p>All academic committee minutes (including faculty committees and student forums) show that all action points are reported and tracked until completed and closed.</p>	<p>Create terms of reference for each committee and review annually.</p> <p>Develop a flow chart of activities to illustrate responsibilities and reporting mechanisms for each committee.</p> <p>Assign formal minute-taking responsibilities for each committee.</p> <p>Implement system of recording and tracking all actions and outcomes.</p>

<p>Ensure that staff receive appropriate training and guidance to enable them to effectively identify and address instances of plagiarism.</p>	<p>Successful implementation of anti-plagiarism training for all staff.</p> <p>Plagiarism detection software effectively used to identify and reduce instances of plagiarism.</p> <p>Internal verification process evidences instances of and responses to plagiarism in student work.</p>	<p>Update student disciplinary policy and procedure to include plagiarism.</p> <p>Design or purchase anti-plagiarism training programme for staff to include training on definition of plagiarism and on plagiarism detection software. All staff to undertake training and pass assessment.</p> <p>Update internal verification form to include section on plagiarism so that plagiarism detection software can be used and outcome recorded for each assessment verified.</p>
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**Column 4: Target date(s)**

Set dates for when the actions will be completed. The more specific the action, the easier it will be to set a realistic target date. Ensure there is a specific target date for each milestone or subsidiary action.

If an action is to happen more than once, state the first date for the action to take place. The word 'ongoing' should not be used.

For example:

- 17 September 2012 and then the third week of every month
- 4 January 2013, 8 February 2013, 8 March 2013
- second week of every term starting January 2013.

**Column 5: Action by**

State the role or job title of the specific person or committee who is responsible for carrying out the action and who is to be accountable for this. Do not include individuals' names, just their role titles. Ensure that the role/committee is different from that in the 'reported to' column.

**Column 6: Reported to**

Identify the role of the person or committee who will monitor the success of the action. A clear designation helps to maintain accountability and ensure successful completion of the action plan. Again, do not include individuals' names, just their role titles.

**Column 7: Evaluation (process or evidence)**

This column **must** be completed **before** returning the action plan to QAA. Identify the processes or evidence that will be used to evaluate the action taken. How will the provider consider whether it has been an appropriate means of addressing the matter identified in the report?

Due to the timescale for completing the action plan, we do not expect that actions will have been completed at the point it is submitted to QAA. Therefore, identify what process or evidence will show how successful the action has been and what the outcomes of the action are.

For example:

- external verifier reports
- end of term course feedback
- quarterly academic board meeting minutes
- student learning journals
- teaching and learning policy and completed teaching observation reports
- annual monitoring reports.

### **Housekeeping**

Before the action plan is returned to QAA, please consider the following.

- Is the action plan in the original format provided by QAA? If not, complete the template that is attached to the draft review report.
- Spell out all acronyms and abbreviations in full.
- Check that the intended outcomes are measurable.
- Check that specific dates have been set for each action (do not use the term 'ongoing').
- Check that the 'action by' role is different from the 'reported to' role.
- Remove any individual names such as 'Dr Jones' and replace with their job title, such as 'Director of Studies'.

## Action plan example

No Name College action plan relating to the Review for Educational Oversight of March 2012						
Good practice	Intended outcomes	Actions to be taken to achieve intended outcomes	Target date(s)	Action by	Reported to	Evaluation (process or evidence)
The review team identified the following areas of <b>good practice</b> that are worthy of wider dissemination within the provider:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the highly effective system used to log all communications to and from the awarding organisations, which records actions taken and the provider's responses, ensuring that all staff are kept well informed (paragraph 1.2).</li> </ul>	<p>All outstanding issues with awarding organisations or bodies are dealt with in the month they are logged.</p> <p>The log is current and accurate.</p> <p>All actions and responses are published on staff section of virtual learning environment. Virtual learning environment log shows pages have been accessed by 75% of</p>	<p>Use of communication log is discussed at monthly Academic Standards and Quality Committee meetings. All actions and responses are reviewed and updated.</p> <p>Any new awarding organisations or bodies are added to the log within one week of programme validation or approval.</p> <p>Publish log actions and responses on staff section of virtual learning environment. (This is a new method of communication and enhances what we currently do.)</p>	<p>Monthly (second Wednesday of each month).</p> <p>Within one week of new programme validation or approval.</p> <p>Set up pages by October 2012. Monitor monthly.</p>	<p>Academic Standards and Quality Committee</p> <p>Relevant Head of Department</p> <p>e-Communications Manager</p>	<p>Senior Management Team</p> <p>Senior Management Team</p> <p>Senior Management Team</p>	<p>Communications log. Academic Standards and Quality Committee meeting minutes.</p> <p>Senior Management Team meeting minutes.</p> <p>Virtual learning environment usage logs.</p>

	staff.					
<b>Essential</b>	<b>Intended outcomes</b>	<b>Actions to be taken to achieve intended outcomes</b>	<b>Target date(s)</b>	<b>Action by</b>	<b>Reported to</b>	<b>Evaluation (process or evidence)</b>
The team considers that it is <b>essential</b> for the provider to:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>develop and embed a robust system for programme design and approval (paragraph 1.3).</li> </ul>	<p>Effective processes are in place to approve and periodically review the validity and relevance of programmes.</p> <p>All programmes are approved and validated prior to students beginning their course of study.</p>	<p>In consultation with Academic Board, Senior Management Team and awarding bodies develop new system for programme design and approval.</p> <p>Ensure all programmes are approved before students are enrolled. No new programmes to run without validation.</p>	<p>September 2012</p> <p>September 2012</p>	<p>Academic Board</p> <p>Heads of Department/ Academic Board</p>	<p>Senior Management Team</p> <p>Senior Management Team/ Director of Studies</p>	<p>Programme design, approval and validation policies and procedures.</p> <p>Signed programme approval and validation documents. Academic Board meeting minutes. Student enrolment data.</p>
<b>Advisable</b>	<b>Intended outcomes</b>	<b>Actions to be taken to achieve intended outcomes</b>	<b>Target date(s)</b>	<b>Action by</b>	<b>Reported to</b>	<b>Evaluation (process or evidence)</b>
The team considers that it is <b>advisable</b> for the provider to:						

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>introduce a more reliable method for the systematic collection of data on student retention, academic standing and achievement (paragraph 1.5).</li> </ul>	<p>Coherent, comprehensive and accurate student data on retention, academic standing and achievement.</p> <p>Annual monitoring process systematically takes due account of relevant data.</p> <p>Student retention 85% or higher.</p>	<p>Develop and implement new system of data compilation and analysis.</p> <p>Reflection on data during annual monitoring process (at annual monitoring validation panels) informs strategic and operational management decisions.</p> <p>Annual data returns produced and shared with college staff.</p> <p>Includes section on previous year's actions and responses to actions.</p>	<p>October 2012 to be implemented by Dec 2012</p> <p>From January 2013, third month of each term</p> <p>Annually from August 2013</p> <p>Annually from September 2013</p>	<p>Director of Studies and Information Services Manager</p> <p>Heads of School</p> <p>Senior Management Team</p> <p>Director of Studies</p>	<p>Senior Management Team</p> <p>Director of Studies</p> <p>Principal</p> <p>Senior Management Team</p>	<p>Senior Management Team meeting minutes. Academic Board minutes.</p> <p>Annual monitoring reports. External verifier reports.</p> <p>Annual monitoring reports. Senior Management Team minutes.</p>
<b>Desirable</b>	<b>Intended outcomes</b>	<b>Actions to be taken to achieve intended outcomes</b>	<b>Target date/s</b>	<b>Action by</b>	<b>Reported to</b>	<b>Evaluation (process or evidence)</b>
The team considers that it is <b>desirable</b> for the provider to:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>formalise the teaching observation processes (paragraph 2.6).</li> </ul>	<p>Teaching and learning policy is approved and implement.</p> <p>90% of teaching staff undergo a teaching</p>	<p>Develop and approve teaching and learning policy to include teaching observation process.</p> <p>Implement and embed teaching observation</p>	<p>December 2012</p> <p>From January 2013</p>	<p>Academic Standards and Quality Committee</p> <p>Director of Studies</p>	<p>Senior Management Team</p> <p>Academic and</p>	<p>Teaching and Learning policy. Teaching observation forms. Teaching observation</p>

	<p>observation at least once per academic year.</p> <p>Where a development requirement is identified, additional support is provided and at least one observation per academic term takes place until no longer required.</p>	<p>process.</p> <p>Annually evaluate the effectiveness of teaching observation process and modify Teaching and Learning policy and procedures accordingly.</p>	<p>July each year from 2013</p>	<p>Director of Studies</p>	<p>Standards Quality Committee</p> <p>Academic Standards and Quality Committee/ Principal</p>	<p>records. Academic Board meeting minutes.</p> <p>Senior Management Team meeting minutes.</p>
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## Annex F: Information about learning opportunities

The purpose of this annex is to give providers and REO teams an indication of the types of information to be considered under the heading of 'information about learning opportunities'.

Information about learning opportunities means information in the public domain about academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. Some information will be produced by awarding bodies/organisations on the provider's behalf; some will be supplied by the provider and published by external organisations like Unistats or UCAS; and some will be produced by the provider itself.

REO considers whether or not the provider has effective procedures for ensuring that the information that it is responsible for producing about itself is accurate and complete. The indicative list below sets out the types of information about academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities that QAA would expect the provider to make available. It should be emphasised that this list is indicative only, because different providers will have different responsibilities for producing information according to their arrangements with awarding bodies/organisations.

REO teams will consider general contextual information about the provider, for example:

- mission statement
- corporate plan
- quality improvement plan
- statement of quality assurance processes and procedures
- learning and teaching and assessment strategies for higher education
- higher education strategy
- information about agreements with awarding bodies/organisations
- details of links with employers.

Teams will also consider information about the academic standards and quality of programmes, for example:

- applications and admissions arrangements
- prospectuses, programme guides or similar
- programme specifications
- student handbooks
- module/unit guides
- information about the provider's and/or its partners' procedures for programme approval, monitoring and review
- policies, processes and procedures for managing academic standards, quality of learning opportunities and information about learning opportunities
- details of accreditation from professional, statutory and regulatory bodies
- the academic environment in which students will be studying and the support made available to them
- what providers expect of current students and what current students can expect of the provider
- results of internal student surveys
- arrangements for assessment and external examination procedures
- policies for student complaints, appeals and representations
- information for students on completion of their studies.

In drawing a conclusion on information about learning opportunities, REO is not concerned with:

- the accuracy and completeness of information that is not available to students or other external stakeholders, such as management information (although teams may be interested in providers' use of this kind of information in the management of academic standards and the management and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities)
- auditing the accuracy of quantitative information
- information about the provider that is produced by other organisations, such as awarding bodies/organisations.

## **Annex G: Role descriptions and person specifications**

### **Role title: coordinator**

#### **Role purpose**

The coordinator manages the review in each of the providers to which he/she is assigned. Key responsibilities include:

- leading a programme of reviews for QAA
- providing clear briefings to a wide range of provider participants on the REO method and participants' respective responsibilities
- discussing and agreeing with the provider the agenda that forms the basis of the review
- discussing and agreeing focused review activities with the provider and the reviewers to ensure effective use of time
- organising and coordinating review activities to ensure that the conclusion, recommendations and judgements are sound and evidence-based
- liaising effectively with all stakeholders through face-to-face, telephone, email and other written communications to ensure the smooth running of each review
- providing additional training for reviewers, if necessary
- making effective use of QAA's secure electronic folder system throughout the review to ensure that a full evidence base is available to reviewers and QAA staff in a timely manner and is archived promptly
- respecting protocols on confidentiality
- producing high quality reports that inform all stakeholders of conclusions, recommendations and judgements, where appropriate.

#### **Person specification**

Knowledge and understanding to include:

- current or recent knowledge and understanding of current issues affecting higher education providers
- awareness of current higher education teaching methods and curricula
- knowledge and understanding of the assurance of standards and quality
- awareness of the role of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies in programme accreditation
- experience of liaison with senior management and a range of staff at other levels.

Skills include ability to:

- manage small teams (with experience in either higher or further education or in other employment)
- work within tight timescales and to strict deadlines
- chair meetings
- communicate effectively in face-to-face interaction
- train others in methods of work
- produce clear and succinct reports on time
- use word-processing software
- communicate electronically, including emails, attachments and use of web mail
- be flexible and devise sound plans when situations change with little notice.

## **Role title: reviewer**

### **Role purpose**

Reviewers contribute to evaluating academic standards and the quality of higher education provision through a peer review process. They engage in a variety of activities designed to gather and analyse evidence so that they can arrive at considered conclusions, recommendations and judgements. These outcomes help the provider being reviewed to prepare an action plan to further enhance higher education provision.

Key responsibilities include:

- reading, analysing and preparing written commentaries of the self-evaluation submitted by the provider and any other documents sent in advance of a review
- adhering to the review schedule agreed between the provider and the coordinator
- participating in visits to the provider in order to gather, share, test and verify evidence
- drawing conclusions and making recommendations and judgements on the academic standards achieved and the quality of the learning opportunities provided
- recording evidence gathered from a variety of review activities and submitting this to the QAA secure folder in a timely fashion
- drafting sections of the report that are referenced to evidence gathered during the review
- respecting protocols on confidentiality
- contributing to and commenting on the review report, to agreed schedules and deadlines
- being available for the whole period of a review for which they have been selected and committing to complete all processes of a review once they have embarked upon it.

### **Person specification**

Knowledge and understanding to include:

- current or recent experience, knowledge and understanding of higher education provision
- knowledge of, and familiarity with, the Quality Code and other external reference points, such as those of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies
- (for reviews requiring subject expertise) experience of providing higher education; (in the case of industrially or professionally based reviewers) familiarity with teaching and learning in higher education
- understanding of programme entry requirements and the ability to interpret progression statistics, including withdrawal, transfer and failure rates and destinations data
- familiarity with academic support strategies and the functions of academic tutorials
- experience of examining and/or verification procedures/processes (preferably including external examining or external verification)
- knowledge of the quality assurance processes employed by public and higher education providers
- familiarity with the standards of higher education awards in the UK.

Skills include the ability to:

- conduct meetings and interviews with staff
- conduct meetings with a range of current and former groups of students
- write succinctly and coherently
- meet tight timescales and deadlines
- work effectively as a member of a team
- work courteously and professionally
- maintain confidentiality
- communicate electronically, including emails, attachments and use of web mail.

## **Role title: facilitator**

### **Role purpose**

The facilitator ensures the smooth running of the review by acting as the single point of contact between the provider staff and the coordinator.

Key responsibilities include:

- providing effective liaison between the reviewers and the provider staff
- ensuring that the reviewers obtain accurate, timely and comprehensive information about the educational provision and the provider context
- helping the reviewers to come to a clear and accurate understanding of the structures, policies, priorities and procedures of the provider, and the nature of the provision under scrutiny
- ensuring that reviewers are provided with appropriate evidence to allow them to reach the conclusion, recommendations and judgements
- bringing additional information to the attention of the reviewers and correcting factual inaccuracy
- observing objectively
- communicating clearly with the reviewers and the subject provider
- respecting protocols on confidentiality
- establishing effective relationships with the coordinator and the reviewers, as well as with the provider staff
- participating in the provider's preparations for the review
- attending all meetings other than those with students and employers, or where judgements are discussed
- monitoring the pattern of review activities
- maintaining regular telephone and/or email contact with the coordinator to ensure that reviewers are receiving the information or documents that they need, particularly for off-site analysis.

Knowledge and understanding to include:

- thorough knowledge of the structure, policies, priorities, procedures and practices of the provider
- knowledge and experience of working in higher education at a senior level
- experience of quality assurance
- knowledge and understanding of REO.

Skills include the ability to:

- locate cogent information
- maintain confidentiality
- deal conscientiously with detail
- make accurate records of discussions
- meet exacting timescales and deadlines
- work effectively with reviewers
- continue to work effectively as part of the provider team after REO has been completed
- communicate electronically, using emails, attachments and web mail
- influence colleagues within their provider and take forward the action plan.

## **Annex H: QAA training and development policy for review team members**

### **Introduction**

This policy applies to REO.

QAA recognises that those selected to be reviewers are drawn from a pool of highly qualified, experienced and well-respected personnel who already have skills in the core activities of review. In particular, they are selected for their highly developed and practised skills of written and oral communication, conduct of meetings, analysis and synthesis of a wide variety of information, and evaluation leading to sound judgement. Reviewer training seeks to build on these skills to assist reviewers to apply them to a specific review process.

The training and development policy will be published.

### **Policy**

The training will be designed to enable reviewers, where appropriate, to:

- participate in accessible and relevant training and development which is economical in the use of their time
- experience learning methods which take account of individual learning styles
- participate in training which takes due account of prevailing legislation
- participate fully in training activities that will be relevant to all participants irrespective of gender, age, ethnicity or disability
- hone and apply core skills essential for all of QAA's methods of review through initial training.

### **What can reviewers expect of QAA?**

Each reviewer can expect QAA to:

- provide induction to the work of QAA, its mission, standards and values
- train them in specialist skills needed to carry out review work, including effective use of the electronic communications system set up to support reviews
- assist them to develop sufficient confidence to undertake their first review
- provide training reference material to use after completion of their training
- provide QAA documents needed to conduct the reviews to which they are assigned
- add them to QAA's mailing list for receipt of relevant new QAA publications and information about QAA's work
- provide them with opportunities to contribute to the evaluation of the methods in which they have reviewed
- publish their name on the register of reviewers:  
[www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/our-reviewers/pages/default.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/our-reviewers/pages/default.aspx).

Assuming successful completion of initial training, QAA will:

- provide reviewers with feedback on their performance on their first review and, where appropriate, guidance on their further development
- encourage each reviewer to engage in the further development of their role as reviewer

- take into account prior QAA review training and experience when training review team members to carry out QAA review methods which are new to them.

Following appointment, reviewers will be expected to perform the role to QAA's requirements and satisfaction. Where a reviewer does not perform satisfactorily, feedback will be provided by the review coordinator or by a QAA officer. If a reviewer does not demonstrate improvement following feedback, they may be removed from the register of reviewers.

### **Benefits for providers and other organisations subject to review**

Adherence to this policy should provide the following benefits:

- confidence that reviewers are properly trained to undertake review work professionally and confidently
- consistent application of each review method
- consistency in the messages about the review method which the reviewers take back to their institutions.

## Annex I: External reference points

In considering a provider's management of its higher education provision, REO teams will be guided by the expectations of external reference points, including the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code). The Quality Code replaces the set of national reference points known as the Academic Infrastructure, from the 2012-13 academic year. The Quality Code gives all higher education providers a shared starting point for setting, describing and assuring the academic standards of their higher education awards and programmes and the quality of the learning opportunities they provide. Providers use it to design their respective policies for maintaining academic standards and quality.

### The UK Quality Code for Higher Education

The Quality Code sets out the formal Expectations that all UK higher education providers reviewed by QAA are required to meet. It is the nationally agreed, definitive point of reference for all those involved in delivering higher education programmes that lead to an award from, or are validated by, a UK higher education awarding body (a provider entitled to award degrees). All higher education providers reviewed by QAA must commit to meeting the Expectations that it sets out.

The Quality Code is based on a number of key values, which are set out below.

- All students are treated fairly, equitably and as individuals.
- Students have the opportunity to contribute to the shaping of their learning experience.
- Students are properly and actively informed at appropriate times of matters relevant to their programmes of study.
- All policies and processes relating to study and programmes are clear and transparent.
- Strategic oversight of academic standards and academic quality is at the highest level of academic governance of the provider.
- All policies and processes are regularly and effectively monitored, reviewed and improved.
- Sufficient and appropriate external involvement exists for the maintenance of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities.
- Staff are supported, enabling them in turn to support students' learning experiences.

Further information about the Quality Code can be found on the QAA website: [www.qaa.ac.uk/qualitycode](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/qualitycode).

The Quality Code has three Parts, on academic standards, academic quality and information about higher education provision. Each of these is subdivided into Chapters covering specific themes.

#### Part A: Setting and maintaining threshold academic standards

These Chapters cover the issues relevant to the setting and maintaining of academic standards.

*Chapter A1: The national level*

*Chapter A2: The subject and qualification level*

*Chapter A3: The programme level*

*Chapter A4: Approval and review*

*Chapter A5: Externality*

*Chapter A6: Assessment of achievement of learning outcomes*

## **Part B: Assuring and enhancing academic quality**

These Chapters cover the issues relevant to ensuring that the quality of learning opportunities meets expectations and is continually being improved.

*Chapter B1: Programme design and approval*

*Chapter B2: Admissions*

*Chapter B3: Learning and teaching*

*Chapter B4: Student support, learning resources and careers education, information, advice and guidance*

*Chapter B5: Student engagement*

*Chapter B6: Assessment of students and accreditation of prior learning*

*Chapter B7: External examining*

*Chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review*

*Chapter B9: Complaints and appeals*

*Chapter B10: Management of collaborative arrangements*

*Chapter B11: Research degrees*

## **Part C: Information about higher education provision**

This shorter Part is not subdivided into chapters. It addresses how providers make available information that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

## **Other external reference points**

Some providers offer only qualifications which are aligned to the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) or the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). In these cases, they will be expected to provide evidence of the use of the other relevant external reference points and guidance on good practice in setting and maintaining academic standards, in assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities for students, and in providing information about learning opportunities about these qualifications. Where providers offer some qualifications which are on the frameworks for higher education qualifications and others which are on the QCF/NQF, they will be expected to show how they use each set of relevant reference points for the purposes set out above. Reviewers will be interested to see whether providers find it useful to use some parts of the Quality Code for QCF/NQF qualifications to assist in their management of standards and quality.

## **The Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF)**

The QCF is a system for recognising skills and qualifications. It does this by awarding credit for qualifications and units (small steps of learning). Each unit has a credit value; this value specifies the number of credits gained by learners who complete that unit. The flexibility of the system allows learners to gain qualifications at their own pace along routes that suit them best. The QCF is maintained by the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual). Further information can be found on their website:

[www.ofqual.gov.uk/qualifications-assessments/89-articles/145-explaining-the-qualifications-and-credit-framework](http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/qualifications-assessments/89-articles/145-explaining-the-qualifications-and-credit-framework).

## **The National Qualifications Framework (NQF)**

The NQF helps learners to make informed decisions about the qualifications they need. They can compare the levels of different qualifications and identify clear progression routes for their chosen career.

Further information about the NQF can be found on the Ofqual website:

[www.ofqual.gov.uk/qualifications-assessments/89-articles/250-explaining-the-national-qualifications-framework](http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/qualifications-assessments/89-articles/250-explaining-the-national-qualifications-framework).

## **Professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) reference points**

Some PSRBs develop their own reference points, for example in relation to curriculum development or professional codes of conduct. Providers should identify where higher education programmes have been developed to meet PSRB requirements.

## **The Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area**

Programmes of study that fall within the scope of REO are referred to as 'higher education' in this handbook. The *Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area* (Bologna Framework/FEHEA) has generic qualification descriptors for each cycle, known as the 'Dublin descriptors'. These have been developed as a set and are intended to be read with reference to each other. They are primarily intended for use in the alignment of qualifications and hence national frameworks. National frameworks may themselves have additional elements or outcomes, and may have more detailed and specific functions. The frameworks for higher education qualifications align with the Dublin descriptors.

**Table 7: Examples of the typical higher education qualifications at each level of *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and the corresponding cycle of the FEHEA<sup>9</sup>**

Main higher education qualifications	FHEQ level	Corresponding FEHEA cycle
Doctoral degrees (eg PhD/DPhil, EdD, DBA, DClinPsy)*	8	Third cycle <b>(end of cycle)</b> qualifications
Master's degrees (eg MPhil, MRes, MA, MSc)	7	Second cycle <b>(end of cycle)</b> qualifications
Master's degrees (integrated)** (eg MEng, MChem, MPhys, MPharm)		
First degrees in medicine, dentistry and veterinary sciences (eg BM, BS, BDS, BVetMed, BVSc)***		
Postgraduate Diplomas		
Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE)****		
Postgraduate certificates		
Bachelor's degrees with honours (eg BA/BSc Hons)	6	First cycle <b>(end of cycle)</b> qualifications
Ordinary bachelor's degrees		
Professional Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE)****		
Graduate diplomas		
Graduate certificates		
Foundation Degrees (FD)		
Diplomas of Higher Education (DipHE)		
Higher National Diplomas (HND)		
Higher National Certificates (HNC)*****	4	
Certificates of Higher Education (CertHE)		

<sup>9</sup> Please note that there is a separate framework for Scottish qualifications: the *Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework*.

## Annex J: Indicative agenda for a monitoring visit

### Principles

- Monitoring visits normally take place on one day, and should include at least one meeting with provider staff (academic and senior management) and one meeting with students.
- Start and end times should be arranged to avoid overnight stays, as far as possible.
- Teams should ensure they have gathered all the evidence they need to write the short update to the review report, before leaving the provider.

**Table 8: Indicative timetable for a one-day monitoring visit**

Time	Activity
1000	Review team arrives and holds first team meeting to review and confirm agendas.
1100-1230	Meeting with staff (senior management and academic).
1230-1400	Team debriefs from staff meeting and prepares for student meeting. Includes working lunch.
1400-1500	Meeting with students.
1500-1700	Team debriefs from student meeting and confirms they have all the evidence required to write the short update to the review report.
1700	Team departs.

If any of the following have taken place since the last review or annual return, the monitoring visit may require additional time, at additional cost:

- change of address, acquisition of a new building, or extension of premises with an increase in capacity by 25 per cent or more
- change of principal and/or proprietor, or equivalent
- change of 20 per cent or more of permanent teaching staff
- change of 30 per cent or more on the type of provision/course offered, including changes of awarding body/organisation.

Notification of three or more of these changes will trigger a full review instead of the monitoring visit.

## Annex K: Glossary and weblinks

<p><b>Academic standards</b></p>	<p>Academic standards are defined as the level of achievement a student has to reach in order to achieve a particular award or qualification. There are nationally agreed reference points for the academic standards of the various levels of higher education qualifications set out in the frameworks for higher education qualifications published by QAA. (See the <b>Quality Code</b>.)</p> <p>An awarding body/organisation is responsible for the academic standards of all awards granted in its name. REO is concerned with how providers exercise any responsibilities they have for the academic standards of the awards that they deliver on behalf of their awarding bodies/organisations.</p> <p>REO considers academic standards against all aspects of the provider's higher education provision, leading to a judgement that is subsequently published. (See <b>Judgements</b>.)</p>
<p><b>Action plan</b></p>	<p>After REO, the provider will be asked to develop an action plan, set out in a format provided by QAA, describing how the provider plans to take action on the findings of the review. The action plan forms part of the final version of the report.</p> <p>QAA will monitor the implementation of the action plan through the next review. The action plan, its implementation and impact will therefore form part of the evidence base for any future review activity. It will also constitute a published record of the provider's commitment to take forward the findings of REO.</p>
<p><b>Advisable recommendation</b></p>	<p>REO reports will include recommendations about how a provider might improve the management of its higher education provision. Recommendations are categorised according to priority.</p> <p>Advisable recommendations relate to matters that the review team believes have the potential to put quality and/or standards at risk and hence require preventative corrective action.</p>
<p><b>Annual return</b></p>	<p>The annual return is part of the monitoring process which takes place between full reviews, on a four-year cycle. The annual return takes the form of a short briefing paper together with links to key documents that provide evidence of any action taken in response to all previous good practice and recommendations.</p> <p>The provider is required to update QAA on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• current programmes offered, awarding bodies/organisations and student numbers</li> <li>• any major strategic or material changes since the last QAA team visit</li> <li>• actions taken to address the good practice and recommendations in the action plan, or subsequent developments</li> <li>• actions taken to address any recommendations in other external reports since the REO (such as awarding body/organisation or professional, statutory or regulatory body reports)</li> <li>• progress in working with relevant external reference points to</li> </ul>

	<p>meet UK expectations for higher education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• engagement of students in quality assurance processes.</li> </ul> <p>The annual return is submitted to QAA around nine months after the last review visit, and is normally followed by a monitoring visit.</p>
<b>Awarding body</b>	<p>Providers do not have powers to award higher education qualifications. They work with awarding bodies and/or one or more higher education institutions, which retain responsibility for the academic standards of all awards granted in their name(s) and for ensuring that the quality of learning opportunities offered through collaborative arrangements are adequate to enable students to achieve the academic standard required for their awards.</p> <p>Although REO is not concerned with how awarding bodies discharge their responsibilities within these arrangements, awarding bodies are important stakeholders in the process. Further guidance on the involvement of awarding bodies in REO is given in Section 4 of this handbook.</p>
<b>Awarding organisation</b>	<p>An organisation authorised to award a particular qualification other than a degree; an organisation recognised by Ofqual to award Ofqual-regulated qualifications.</p>
<b>Briefing</b>	<p>The briefing is the first stage of the REO process. Its purposes are to describe REO in more detail, allow providers and awarding bodies/organisations to ask any questions about the method, and to give further advice and guidance on preparing a self-evaluation and on helping students to prepare a submission. Normally the briefing is also an opportunity for providers and awarding bodies/organisations to meet some coordinators and to talk to other providers who are preparing for REO.</p>
<b>Concerns Scheme</b>	<p>QAA investigates concerns about the standards and quality of higher education provision raised by students, staff, and other people and organisations, where we think these concerns indicate serious systemic or procedural problems.</p> <p>QAA can investigate concerns about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• academic standards - the level of achievement a student has to reach in order to achieve a particular award or qualification</li> <li>• academic quality - everything that a university or college provides to ensure its students have the best possible opportunity to achieve the required standard (this includes teaching, learning resources and academic support)</li> <li>• the accuracy and completeness of the information institutions produce about their higher education provision.</li> </ul> <p>Concerns may be followed up through educational oversight reviews or as a separate process. Further information about the concerns process can be found on the QAA website:  <a href="http://www.qaa.ac.uk/complaints/concerns/pages/default.aspx">www.qaa.ac.uk/complaints/concerns/pages/default.aspx</a>.</p>
<b>Confidence</b>	<p>REO teams are required to make judgements about providers' management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. The judgements are 'confidence', 'limited confidence' or 'no confidence'.</p>

	<p>A judgement of 'confidence' will be reached where:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a provider is found to be effective in managing its responsibilities for delivering academic standards</li> <li>• the prospects for academic standards and quality being maintained at current levels appear sound</li> <li>• the provider has rigorous mechanisms for the management of its higher education programmes in accordance with the awarding bodies'/organisations' requirements.</li> </ul> <p>Such a judgement will be reached on the basis of evidence that the provider has sound structures and procedures for assuring and enhancing quality and the delivery of standards, that it is successful in managing them, and that they are applied effectively to each higher education programme. This judgement will be accompanied by recommendations for actions that are considered advisable and/or desirable (but never essential); however, the overall judgement should not be seen as being qualified by such recommendations.</p> <p>A judgement of 'confidence' is, therefore, an expression of belief in a provider's commitment and ability to identify and address any situation that potentially threatens the delivery of the standards of awards or the quality of student learning opportunities, or the provider's ability to meet its contractual obligations. This includes considering and addressing in a mature and engaged manner, through its own procedures and those of its awarding bodies/organisations, any recommendations contained in the report.</p>
<b>Conflicts of interest</b>	<p>Reviewers will not be eligible to be part of a team when a conflict of interest is identified. Conflicts include situations where:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• they have worked for the provider or its collaborative partners during the last five years</li> <li>• they have undertaken external examining or consultancy work at the provider or its collaborative partners during the last three years</li> <li>• they have recently made an application for a post at the provider</li> <li>• a close relative is working or studying at the provider</li> <li>• the provider is an institution where the reviewer himself/herself has studied for a higher education qualification (usually but not always deemed to present a conflict of interest).</li> </ul>
<b>Coordinator</b>	<p>Coordinators are contracted by QAA to manage a number of REOs. They are selected for their experience of the management of higher education.</p> <p>The coordinator manages the review on behalf of QAA. He/she is responsible for guiding the provider on preparing its self-evaluation, chairing the preparatory meeting, discussing and agreeing the programme for the visit with the provider and the rest of the REO team, identifying the most effective way of engaging with students, discussing with awarding bodies/organisations their involvement in REO (if required), leading the team at the visit, editing REO reports, responding to any comments on the reports from the provider, and keeping in touch with the provider. A full description of the role is given in Annex G.</p>

	The coordinator is the provider's first and main point of contact throughout the review process.
<b>Desirable recommendation</b>	<p>REO reports will include recommendations about how the provider might improve the management of its higher education provision. Recommendations are categorised according to priority.</p> <p>Desirable recommendations relate to matters that the review team believes have the potential to enhance quality, build capacity and/or further secure standards.</p>
<b>Enhancement</b>	For the purposes of REO, QAA uses the term 'enhancement' to mean the continuous improvement of a provider's management of the learning experience of students on its higher education provision, for the benefit of students, and within the context of its agreement(s) with its awarding bodies/organisations.
<b>Essential recommendation</b>	<p>REO reports will include recommendations about how the provider might improve the management of its higher education provision. Recommendations are categorised according to priority.</p> <p>Essential recommendations refer to issues which the review team believes are currently putting quality and/or standards at risk and hence require urgent corrective action.</p> <p>When essential recommendations are made at the end of the review, they will be reflected in a judgement of 'limited confidence' or 'no confidence', and/or that 'reliance cannot be placed on the accuracy and/or completeness of all the information about learning opportunities that the provider is responsible for producing about itself'.</p>
<b>Evidence</b>	<p>REO is an evidence-based process. This means that review teams conduct their enquiries primarily by comparing evidence about the provider's management of its higher education provision with its own policies and procedures, the agreements it has with its awarding bodies/organisations, and the expectations of the Quality Code and/or other external reference points.</p> <p>Evidence comes in a wide range of forms and will vary from provider to provider. It is likely to include formal agreements with awarding bodies/organisations, policies and procedures for the management of the student learning experience of higher education programmes, external examiners' reports, validation documents, data about the provider on the Unistats website (<a href="http://www.unistats.com">www.unistats.com</a>), review and inspection reports of other organisations, and any information arising from meetings with staff and students.</p> <p>Some of this evidence, such as review reports by other organisations, will be available publicly. Other elements should be supplied by the provider as part of its self-evaluation or supporting evidence. There is guidance on developing the self-evaluation, including a list of supporting evidence, in Section 3 of this handbook. Once the team has read the self-evaluation, the coordinator may ask for more evidence to be available at the visit itself. The coordinator will confirm at the preparatory meeting, or at least three weeks before the visit, precisely what further evidence is required.</p>

<b>External reference points</b>	<p>External reference points are the guidance or requirements provided by awarding bodies/organisations or other organisations (such as professional bodies) for qualifications which are aligned to the Qualifications and Curriculum Framework (QCF), the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW), or the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). These reference points and/or guidance can be similar in purpose to the <b>Quality Code</b> for qualifications on the frameworks for higher education qualifications.</p> <p>The other reference points will deal with good practice in setting and maintaining academic standards, in assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities for students, and in providing information about learning opportunities about those qualifications. In these cases providers will be expected to show the review team evidence of the use of the other external reference points in the management of their higher education provision not on the frameworks for higher education qualifications. Where providers offer some qualifications which are on the frameworks for higher education qualifications and others which are on the QCF/NQF, they will be expected to show how they use each set of relevant reference points. Reviewers will be interested to see whether providers find it useful to use some parts of the <b>Quality Code</b> for QCF/NQF/CQFW/SCQF qualifications to assist in their management of standards and quality.</p> <p>The review process and the possible judgements are the same regardless of the set(s) of external reference points used.</p>
<b>Facilitator</b>	<p>For the review, the provider is invited to nominate a facilitator. The facilitator acts as a single point of contact between the provider and the coordinator, and through her/him the REO team. The facilitator's responsibilities include, in consultation with the coordinator, ensuring that reviewers have the relevant evidence to enable them to conduct the review (including when the team is off-site), bringing additional information to the attention of the reviewers, and helping to clarify any matters of fact.</p> <p>In addition, the facilitator attends all review team meetings other than those with students and employers, or where judgements are discussed. The facilitator does not contribute to the review report or its judgements.</p> <p>Facilitators will be trained for the role alongside reviewers. For more information, see Annex G.</p>
<b>Good practice</b>	<p>Good practice is practice that the REO team regards as making a particularly positive contribution to the provider's management of academic standards and/or academic quality in the context of that particular provider, and which is worthy of wider dissemination within and/or beyond the provider.</p> <p>REO reports are likely to include features of good practice. QAA will disseminate good practice identified through REO in periodic publications.</p>

<b>Higher education reviewed by REO</b>	REO is concerned with taught higher education programmes of study at levels 4-7 on <i>The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)</i> , and levels 7-11 on <i>The framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland</i> . It also applies to programmes at levels 4-7 on the Qualifications and Curriculum Framework and/or the National Qualifications Framework. REO does not apply to research degrees or to teacher and tutor education programmes.
<b>Information about learning opportunities</b>	<p>Information about learning opportunities is information about the academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities that is in the public domain. This includes information available to students and staff. In some cases the awarding bodies/organisations are responsible for producing information on the providers' behalf; some information about learning opportunities will be provided by the provider and produced by external organisations such as Unistats; and in other cases publication will be the direct responsibility of the provider.</p> <p>REO considers whether or not the information that the provider produces for its intended audiences is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. An indicative list of this information is provided in Annex F. It should be emphasised that this list is indicative only, because providers will have different responsibilities for producing information according to their agreements with awarding bodies/organisations.</p> <p>A judgement that 'reliance can be placed on the information the provider produces for its intended audiences about the learning opportunities it offers' will be reached where the provider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• recognises all the information that it is responsible for producing within the area under review</li> <li>• has rigorous mechanisms for the management of these responsibilities, which ensure that the information it produces is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy</li> <li>• has supplied evidence that this is the case.</li> </ul> <p>A judgement that 'reliance cannot be placed on the information the provider produces for its intended audiences about the learning opportunities it offers' will be reached where:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a provider does not recognise all of the information that it is responsible for producing</li> </ul> <p><b>and/or</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a provider does not have effective mechanisms for ensuring that the information is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.</li> </ul>
<b>Limited confidence</b>	<p>REO teams are required to make judgements about providers' management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. The judgements are 'confidence', 'limited confidence' or 'no confidence'.</p> <p>A judgement of 'limited confidence' indicates that there is evidence that the provider's capacity to manage the quality of learning opportunities and/or the security of the standards of its awards soundly and effectively is limited or is likely to become limited in the future.</p>

	<p>The reason for this judgement may be significant weaknesses either in the management of the provider's structures and procedures or in their implementation. Confidence may be limited either because of the extent or the degree of weaknesses identified. The determining factor in reaching a judgement of 'limited confidence' is not simply evidence of problems in some programmes - no institution could be expected to avoid these entirely. It is, instead, the fact that the provider may not have been fully aware of the problems and/or has failed to take prompt and appropriate action to remedy them. The review team may also express 'limited confidence' where the provider makes a less than full use of independent external examiners and/or independent external persons in internal quality management procedures.</p> <p>'Limited confidence' judgements are likely to be accompanied by a number of recommendations graded essential or advisable.</p>
<b>Monitoring visit</b>	<p>The monitoring visit takes place around three months after the submission of the annual return. The monitoring visit will last for one day, and will normally include meetings with the provider's staff and students. The monitoring team will normally consist of a review coordinator and one reviewer. The team will produce a short update to the existing report that will comment on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• any changes since the last review or monitoring visit</li> <li>• the progress that has been made against the good practice and recommendations made in the most recent QAA report for the provider</li> <li>• progress on working with external reference points to meet UK expectations for higher education</li> <li>• any matters that should be followed up in the next monitoring or review visit</li> <li>• a conclusion on the progress made in responding to the previous review or monitoring visit.</li> </ul>
<b>No confidence</b>	<p>REO teams are asked to make judgements about the provider's management of academic standards and quality. The judgements are 'confidence', 'limited confidence' or 'no confidence'.</p> <p>Where major doubts exist about significant aspects of a provider's current or likely future capacity to deliver, secure and maintain academic standards and/or the quality of learning opportunities, the provider will receive a judgement of 'no confidence'. A 'no confidence' judgement will be made with reference to what the awarding bodies/organisations require of the provider. The report will identify the main areas of concern, discuss the means by which such a situation was able to arise and be sustained, and advise students and other stakeholders of the existence of failing or unsatisfactory academic standards or quality of provision. It will contain one or more recommendations considered essential and others considered advisable and/or desirable.</p> <p>A judgement of 'no confidence' will reflect serious procedural inadequacies or implementation failures, and will be indicative of fundamental weaknesses in a provider's capacity to manage its responsibilities for the delivery of academic standards or for providing higher education of an appropriate quality. It will have</p>

	serious implications for awarding bodies/organisations, which are likely to wish to take urgent action. A judgement of 'no confidence' will trigger follow-up action.
<b>Partnership agreement</b>	<p>Providers have formal partnership agreements, sometimes called memoranda of understanding, with their higher education institution awarding bodies or awarding organisation, and many of these describe precisely the provider's responsibilities for any given higher education programme.</p> <p>These agreements will be very useful to REO teams in identifying the parameters of each particular review. Such agreements will form a key part of the provider's self-evaluation. Where an agreement does not identify the provider's responsibilities in detail, then it may be appropriate for the provider and the awarding body/organisation to provide further information, or for the awarding body/organisation to participate in the visit. Completion of the responsibilities checklist (see Annex B), which should be submitted with the self-evaluation, is an effective way of providing this information. Section 2 of this handbook provides more information about this.</p>
<b>Peer review</b>	REO is a peer review process. This means that the reviews are conducted by people with current or very recent experience of managing, developing, delivering and/or assessing higher education in institutions and/or providers. As a result, REO reports are based upon a working knowledge of UK higher education and, more specifically, an understanding of the challenges of managing higher education academic standards and quality effectively.
<b>Preparatory meeting</b>	<p>Typically four weeks before a review visit, there is a preparatory meeting for the visit between provider staff, students and the coordinator.</p> <p>The purpose of the preparatory meeting is to develop the agenda for the visit and identify further evidence for the provider to supply to the team, based on an analysis of the provider's self-evaluation and the student submission. This meeting also gives the opportunity for the provider to ask the coordinator any questions. Awarding bodies/ organisations may also attend this meeting.</p> <p>An indicative agenda for the preparatory meeting is provided in Annex C.</p>
<b>Provider</b>	The term 'independent college' refers to a range of organisations, including some operating for profit, and including those with charitable status. This handbook refers to the range of independent colleges as 'providers'.
<b>Provisional judgement meeting</b>	<p>REO teams meet around one week after the visit to agree summaries of evidence, to make provisional judgements, and to identify provisional good practice and recommendations.</p> <p>The coordinator will inform the provider about the outcome of the provisional judgement meeting in writing, usually within one week of the meeting. All judgements, good practice and recommendations remain provisional until the provider has had the opportunity to highlight any areas in the draft report that it regards as inaccurate or incomplete, and until the review team has finalised the report in response to the provider's comments. Occasionally, the judgements will remain provisional until the team has completed a second visit.</p>

	All provisional judgements are made with reference to what the awarding bodies/organisations require of the provider.
<b>QAA</b>	<p>The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) was established in 1997 and is an independent body funded by subscriptions from UK universities and providers of higher education, and through contracts with the main UK higher education funding bodies.</p> <p>QAA's mission is to safeguard standards and improve the quality of UK higher education. QAA does this by working with universities and other higher education providers to define academic standards and quality, and by carrying out and publishing reviews against these benchmarks.</p>
<b>QAA officer</b>	<p>Each REO is supported by a QAA officer called the 'review support officer'. The QAA officer's role is to ensure that the process is applied in accordance with this handbook and that the provider meets its obligations to provide information in a timely manner.</p> <p>The QAA officer may attend the preparatory meeting and one or more days of a visit for monitoring purposes. The QAA officer does not take part in the review.</p>
<b>Quality Code</b>	<p>The UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) replaces the set of national reference points known as the Academic Infrastructure, from the 2012-13 academic year. The Quality Code gives all higher education providers a shared starting point for setting, describing and assuring the academic standards of their higher education awards and programmes and the quality of the learning opportunities they provide. Providers use it to design their respective policies for maintaining academic standards and quality.</p> <p>Further information about the Quality Code can be found in Annex I of this handbook, and on the QAA website: <a href="http://www.qaa.ac.uk/qualitycode">www.qaa.ac.uk/qualitycode</a>.</p>
<b>Quality of learning opportunities</b>	<p>Quality of learning opportunities means the effectiveness of everything that is done or provided (the 'learning opportunities') by the provider to ensure that its students have the best possible opportunity to meet the intended learning outcomes of their programmes and the academic standards of the awards they are seeking.</p> <p>The review considers the quality of learning opportunities against all aspects of the provider's provision, leading to a judgement that is subsequently published. (See <b>Judgements</b>.)</p>
<b>Recommendations</b>	REO reports will include recommendations for the provider about how it might improve the management of its higher education provision. Recommendations are for actions categorised as 'essential', 'advisable' or 'desirable' according to priority.
<b>Reliance can/cannot be placed on information about learning opportunities</b>	See <b>Information about learning opportunities</b> .
<b>Reports</b>	REO culminates in a report of the team's findings. Review reports will be published on QAA's public website.

	Providers and their awarding bodies/organisations will always be invited to provide comments on a draft report and to indicate any areas that they consider incomplete or inaccurate. The coordinator will provide further guidance on the procedures for making comments on reports.
<b>Review</b>	In this handbook 'review' means Review for Educational Oversight (REO). REO evaluates all aspects of the provider's management of its higher education provision and leads to judgements about the management of that provision within the context of the provider's agreement with its awarding bodies/organisations.
<b>Reviewer</b>	Reviewers are external peers with current or recent experience of managing, developing, delivering and/or assessing higher education in higher education institutions and/or providers. Reviewers are not employees of QAA, although they are paid for taking part in REO. Reviewers are trained specifically for the role by QAA (see Annex H).
<b>Second visits</b>	<p>A provider may request a second visit if the review team makes a provisional judgement of 'limited confidence' or 'no confidence' in either the management of academic standards or the management or enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities, or a judgement of 'no reliance' on information about learning opportunities. The second visit is at QAA's discretion. QAA will consider a second visit on the following grounds:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the provider identifies relevant evidence, that was in existence at the time of the review visit, that was not scrutinised during the review, and could have a significant bearing on the final judgements</li> <li>• errors were identified in information about learning opportunities which need to be corrected, but do not indicate systemic problems in the provider's processes for ensuring that information is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.</li> </ul> <p>Further information about second visits can be found on the QAA website:  <a href="http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/REO-second-visits-follow-up-action.aspx">www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/REO-second-visits-follow-up-action.aspx</a>.</p>
<b>Self-evaluation</b>	<p>REO is based on a self-evaluation prepared by the provider. The self-evaluation describes the responsibilities that the provider has for the management of its higher education provision and evaluates the effectiveness of the policies and procedures it has adopted for discharging these responsibilities. An effective self-evaluation is key to the provider gaining substantial benefit from REO and to the smooth running of the review. QAA therefore encourages providers to give its preparation due time and attention. The preparation of a self-evaluation is a major focus of the briefing that QAA will arrange for providers and their awarding bodies.</p> <p>In order to limit the burden of the exercise, providers should as far as possible describe their responsibilities, processes and procedures with reference to a portfolio of existing documents, with any new material limited to a commentary that signposts and/or contextualises the existing material for the team.</p>
<b>Student submission</b>	One of REO's aims is to support providers in reviewing and improving the management of their higher education provision for the

	<p>benefit of students. Within this context, in developing their conclusions about the provider's provision teams need to draw on students' views about their experiences as learners. Teams will meet students at the visit as a matter of course. QAA will also invite students to prepare a submission before the visit, to help them make sure that students' views inform the arrangements for the visit.</p> <p>Student submissions may take a variety of forms, such as a summary of responses to recent student questionnaires or a written report of student focus groups. QAA will provide further guidance to students in a separate guidance note. The principle of the submission, irrespective of its form, is that it should reflect the students' own views of their experiences as learners. Providers may, however, have a valuable role to play in helping their students to prepare a submission, for example by sharing information with them. QAA will provide further guidance to providers during preparations for REO, and students will be invited to the briefing. After the briefing, coordinators will also have the responsibility of discussing with the provider how the provider might assist students to develop a submission for REO.</p> <p>The student submission is voluntary. If students are not able to make a submission, despite the best efforts of the provider and the coordinator, this will not prejudice the outcomes of REO.</p>
<b>Team</b>	<p>The review team normally comprises the coordinator and three reviewers. However, for providers with fewer than 100 students there will be two reviewers. REO team selection will be made with reference to a provider's higher education provision. QAA will avoid known conflicts of interest.</p> <p>QAA will send brief details of proposed teams to providers and their awarding bodies not less than 11 weeks before the review visit, allowing the provider one week to draw QAA's attention in writing to any conflicts of interest they believe QAA has not identified.</p>
<b>UK Quality Code for Higher Education</b>	See <b>Quality Code</b> .
<b>Unistats</b>	Unistats brings together authoritative, official information from universities and providers in the UK, in one place, in a way that is not available on any other website. It includes the results of the annual National Student Survey (NSS). The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) owns the Unistats websites and has contracted the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) to manage the delivery and maintenance of these websites on its behalf.
<b>Visit</b>	<p>Each REO visit normally takes place over two consecutive days. The purpose of visits is to allow the review team to scrutinise evidence on-site; meet provider staff, students and other stakeholders (such as awarding bodies'/organisations' representatives and employers, where appropriate); and consider the extent of the provider's engagement with the Quality Code or other external reference points.</p> <p>An indicative programme for a review visit is provided in Annex D.</p>

	<p>The coordinator will discuss and agree the programme for each visit with the provider beforehand. During the visit itself, it is helpful if the provider can make a room available as a workroom for the review team and a separate and larger room available for meetings.</p>
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## Useful weblinks

QAA

[www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)

UK Quality Code for Higher Education

[www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code)

*The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)*

[www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/the-framework-for-higher-education-qualifications-in-England-Wales-and-Northern-Ireland.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/the-framework-for-higher-education-qualifications-in-England-Wales-and-Northern-Ireland.aspx)

*The framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland*

[www.qaa.ac.uk/assuringstandardsandquality/qualifications/pages/framework-for-HE-qualifications-in-Scotland.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuringstandardsandquality/qualifications/pages/framework-for-HE-qualifications-in-Scotland.aspx)

*Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*

[www.qaa.ac.uk/assuringstandardsandquality/code-of-practice/pages/default.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuringstandardsandquality/code-of-practice/pages/default.aspx)

Subject benchmark statements

[www.qaa.ac.uk/assuringstandardsandquality/subject-guidance/pages/subject-benchmark-statements.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuringstandardsandquality/subject-guidance/pages/subject-benchmark-statements.aspx)

Programme specifications

[www.qaa.ac.uk/assuringstandardsandquality/subject-guidance/pages/programme-specifications.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuringstandardsandquality/subject-guidance/pages/programme-specifications.aspx)

Guidelines on the accreditation of prior learning

[www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Guidelines-on-the-accreditation-of-prior-learning-September-2004.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Guidelines-on-the-accreditation-of-prior-learning-September-2004.aspx)

National Qualifications Framework

[www.ofqual.gov.uk/qualifications-assessments/89-articles/250-explaining-the-national-qualifications-framework](http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/qualifications-assessments/89-articles/250-explaining-the-national-qualifications-framework)

Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales

[www.cqfw.net](http://www.cqfw.net)

Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework

[www.scqf.org.uk](http://www.scqf.org.uk)

## Student guides to REO

Mini guide: A brief student guide to REO

[www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/REO-mini-guide-2012.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/REO-mini-guide-2012.aspx)

Review for Educational Oversight: The student submission

[www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/REO-student-submission-2012.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/REO-student-submission-2012.aspx)

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