



# **Review of College Higher Education**

**A handbook for colleges**

**July 2012**

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## Part One: Introduction, review aims and background

### Introduction

1 The mission of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) is to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of higher education qualifications and to inform and encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of higher education. In furtherance of this mission, QAA undertakes reviews of higher education provision delivered in further education colleges (colleges) on behalf of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), which has statutory responsibility for ensuring that provision is made for assessing the quality of education provided by the institutions it funds. From 2012-13 the process of review used in colleges in England is called Review of College Higher Education (RCHE). RCHE replaces Integrated quality and enhancement review (IQER) that ran between 2007-08 and 2011-12.

2 The purpose of this handbook is to:

- state the aims of RCHE
- describe the programmes of study that RCHE covers
- explain how RCHE works
- provide guidance to colleges and their awarding bodies preparing for, and taking part in, RCHE in 2012-13.<sup>1</sup>

3 The handbook is intended primarily for teams conducting RCHE and for college staff who are directly involved in RCHE. It is also intended to provide information and guidance for other staff in colleges and for colleges' awarding bodies. It is not intended for students, for whom QAA is producing a separate guidance note. QAA is also developing other guidance notes to assist colleges in preparing for RCHE and will provide support for the implementation of RCHE through briefing and training events.

### Aims of Review of College Higher Education

4 With the exception of those colleges that are entitled to award Foundation Degrees (none of which will be reviewed in 2012-13), colleges do not have powers to award higher education qualifications. They work with awarding bodies, in particular Edexcel and/or one or more higher education institutions, which 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 standards required for their awards. RCHE is concerned with the way in which colleges discharge their responsibilities within the context of their agreements with awarding bodies. It is not concerned with how awarding bodies manage their responsibilities for collaborative agreements. QAA reviews the responsibilities of higher education institutions within these agreements through other means.

5 Within this context, the primary aim of RCHE is to provide accessible information for the public which indicates whether a college, within the context of its agreements with its awarding body or bodies:

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<sup>1</sup> Beyond 2012-13 the method is likely to change as a function of HEFCE's development of a more risk-based approach to quality assurance. A revised handbook, for colleges participating in review after the end of the 2012-13 academic year, will be published in early 2013.

- sets and maintains UK-agreed threshold standards for its higher education awards as set out in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ)
- provides learning opportunities (including teaching and academic support) which allow students to achieve those higher education awards and qualifications and reflect the expectations outlined in the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code), and other UK-agreed reference points
- produces public information for applicants, students and other users that is fit-for-purpose, accessible and trustworthy
- plans effectively to enhance the quality of its higher education provision.

## Judgements

6 In order to support this aim we will ask review teams to make judgements on:

- whether the college fulfils its responsibilities for maintaining the threshold academic standards set by its awarding bodies
- the quality of students' learning opportunities
- the quality of information produced for students and applicants
- the college's enhancement of students' learning opportunities.

7 The judgement will be determined by several factors:

- the college's awareness of, and engagement with, the Quality Code and other agreed external reference points
- the extent to which students and staff have input into the management of quality
- the strategic mechanisms which a college has for guiding and reviewing its management of quality and standards.

8 The judgements will be made by peers with knowledge of the higher education sector's expectations for quality assurance. Judgements represent the reasonable conclusions that informed peers are able to come to, based on the evidence and time available to them in review. Judgements may be differentiated by awarding body.

9 The judgements are made in the context of UK expectations on the management and quality assurance of higher education. These expectations are described in the following documents:

- the UK Quality Code for Higher Education
- UK professional standards framework for teaching and supporting learning in higher education
- guidance for supporting international students.

10 The judgement on academic standards will be expressed either as 'meets UK expectations' or 'does not meet UK expectations'. The judgements on the quality of student learning opportunities, information provided by the college, and the enhancement of student learning opportunities, will each be expressed as one of the following: 'is commended'; 'meets UK expectations'; 'requires improvement to meet UK expectations'; or 'does not meet UK expectations'. The latter two categories of judgement are considered to be 'fail' judgements, and therefore there will be follow-up action to complete the review. The criteria which the review teams will use to determine their judgements are set out in Annex 2.

11 Review judgements at any level will be open to high-level differentiation so that a judgement may apply, for example, to provision at a certain award level or provision associated with a particular awarding body.

12 The review team will identify features of good practice and, where appropriate, affirm developments or plans already in progress in the college. The team will also make recommendations for action. Unlike in IQER, these recommendations will not be categorised as 'essential', 'advisable', or 'desirable', but instead will indicate the urgency with which the team thinks each recommendation should be addressed. The team may indicate that a recommendation should be addressed within three months, or before the start of the next academic year, or before any further students are recruited to a programme, and so on. QAA will expect colleges to take notice of these deadlines when they put together their action plan after the review.

13 Review reports will also include a commentary on the thematic element of the review.

## **Core and thematic elements**

14 In accordance with the review of higher education institutions, HEFCE has requested that RCHE should comprise both a core element, which is applied to all colleges, and a thematic element, which will change annually.

15 The core element will examine the effectiveness of the policies, structures and processes that the college uses to discharge its responsibilities for academic standards, quality, information and enhancement, as described above.

16 The inclusion of a thematic element in the review will provide some flexibility within the review process to look in a timely way at issues that are attracting legitimate public interest or concern. The thematic element will allow reviewers to explore a college's engagement with a particular quality assurance theme. As a result, the thematic element will promote development through the sharing of good practice across higher education providers. In order to promote consistency and comparability of review findings, the thematic element will not be subject to a judgement. Instead, the review report will contain a commentary on the thematic element.

17 In 2012-13 there will be two themes: the First-Year Student Experience and Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement. Further guidance on how and when colleges should choose from these two themes appears in Part Two of this handbook.

18 QAA will brief review team members on the approach to reviewing themes in general, and any specific guidance which needs to be borne in mind for a particular theme. Colleges will be provided with a guide containing topics and questions for the theme area, which the college should address in an annex to the self-evaluation. Student representatives will also receive the guide so that they can address the theme in an annex to the student submission. Where agreed external reference points exist, the guide will be based on those reference points. Where no such agreed reference points exist, QAA will develop a set of prompts for guidance. The annex will give the college the opportunity to evaluate its own management in the theme area.

19 The review report will contain a summary of the findings of the thematic review. The college will also receive a more detailed evidence base for the thematic element. The evidence base information will be used by QAA to report on the thematic findings across the higher education sector.

## Coverage

20 RCHE is concerned with all provision which is aligned to *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). It also includes foundation years and other provision commonly referred to as 'Level 0' where this is funded by HEFCE, whether this funding is provided directly, indirectly or through a consortium. For Level 0 provision, review teams will have the same expectations as for other higher education provision with regard to quality of learning opportunities, information, and enhancement. With respect to academic standards, the review team will expect to see evidence that external reference points have been used in setting standards.

## Evidence base for the review

21 To enable them to form their judgements, review teams will have available to them a variety of information sources about a college, including:

- a self-evaluation of the college to include the college's approach to:
  - fulfilling its responsibilities for maintaining academic standards set by its awarding bodies
  - the management of the quality of students' learning opportunities
  - the management of information
  - the management of enhancement
- reference in the self-evaluation to evidence which supports the college's view of the effectiveness of its approach
- how the college works with employers in developing and delivering vocational programmes, including the management of work-based learning
- other key documents as specified from time to time
- a student submission prepared by representatives of students of the college on behalf of the student body
- reports on the college or its provision within the five years preceding the review. Examples of reports include those produced by QAA and other relevant bodies, such as professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs). Relevant action plans and progress reports will also be taken into account, including action plans from previous QAA reviews.

22 In planning for review, QAA will try, as far as possible, to avoid clashes with other organisations' review activities. When QAA knows of dates of other review activities, we will try to conduct our activities to help to limit regulatory burden on Colleges. This is in line with the call in the Government White Paper *Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System* to minimise overlap between methods and reduce burden on higher education providers.

## Use of reference points

23 Review teams will use the Quality Code as a reference point when considering a college's approach to academic standards, quality, information, and enhancement of provision. Teams will be looking for evidence that colleges have:

- carefully considered the purpose and intentions of the elements of the Quality Code
- reflected on the impact of the Quality Code's expectations on college practice
- taken, or are taking, any necessary measures to achieve better alignment between college practice and the guidance provided by the Quality Code.

24 Review teams will not specifically ask colleges about their engagement with the Quality Code on a chapter by chapter basis. However, a team will expect to see, in the self-evaluation, a reflection on how the college has gone about engaging with the expectations of the Quality Code overall. This account could include illustration of how any changes to its practices have resulted, and any areas of difficulty that the college has experienced in addressing the Quality Code.

25 Review teams will enquire into the way in which any relevant subject benchmark statements have been referred to when establishing or reviewing programmes and awards in conjunction with the college's awarding bodies. Award benchmark statements, for example the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark*, provide a description of the characteristics of a particular award. Award and subject benchmark statements do not represent a national curriculum. Instead, they allow for flexibility and innovation in programme design, within an overall conceptual framework established by an academic subject community. They do, however, provide authoritative reference points, which help to ensure that the standards of the programme are appropriate, and which students and other interested parties will expect to be taken into account when programmes are designed and reviewed.

26 Programme specifications are the definitive published information on the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected achievements of programmes of study. Review teams will explore their usefulness to students and staff, and the accuracy of the information contained in them. In particular, teams will be interested to see how programme specifications make use of other reference points in the Quality Code in order to define clearly the expectations that students should have for the teaching, learning and assessment provided by the programme.

## **Reviewers and review teams**

27 Roles: it is expected that the review team will normally comprise three reviewers (one of whom will be a student reviewer) and a QAA officer who will provide administrative support and fulfil the primary coordination and liaison functions. Reviewers and student reviewers will perform the same duties. In the case of colleges with extensive or complex provision, a team may need to include additional reviewers. This will ensure that sufficient coverage of the college's portfolio of activity can be obtained to inform the judgements and comments being made.

28 Selection: QAA hopes that its current cohort of reviewers will wish to take part in the new review method. They will continue to be expected to have current or recent senior-level expertise and experience in a college or other higher education provider. This expertise and experience will include the fulfilling of responsibilities for maintaining academic standards set by awarding bodies, and the management of higher education provision. Student reviewers will be recruited from students, sabbatical officers and graduates who have experience of studying in a UK higher education institution or college within the previous two years. The experience should normally be equivalent to at least one year's full-time study, and will include those who also have experience in representing students' interests in their place of study.

29 If QAA needs to recruit further reviewers, they will be selected from nominations made by colleges or self-nominations. Role descriptions and selection criteria for review team members will be published. Every attempt will be made to ensure that the cohort appropriately reflects diversity, including academic discipline, geographical location, and size of college, as well as reflecting those from diverse backgrounds. We will encourage applications from those in diversity groups currently under-represented in the review team member cohort.



30 Training: training for review team members will be undertaken by QAA. Both new team members and those who have taken part in previous review methods will be required to take part in training before they conduct a review. The purpose of the training will be to ensure that all team members fully understand the aims and objectives of the review process; that they are acquainted with all the procedures involved; and that they understand their own roles and tasks, QAA's expectations of them and the rules of conduct governing the process. We will also provide opportunities for continuing development of review team members and procedures for evaluating and enhancing team performance.

## **Duration of review visits**

31 There will be two visits to the college: the first team visit and the review visit. The duration of the first team visit will be up to one and a half days; the review visit will be between two and four days depending on a number of factors including the complexity of the college's provision. Further information is provided in Part Two of this handbook.

## **The role of students**

32 Students are central to RCHE. There are a number of opportunities for the college's students to take part in the review, including:

- contributing to the student submission
- attending the preparatory meeting
- participating in meetings during the review
- contributing their views directly to the review team
- nominating a lead student representative.

33 The review team will also contain a student reviewer.

## **College facilitators**

34 Colleges will be invited to nominate a facilitator to liaise with the review team and different parts of the college, and to provide the team with advice and guidance on college structures, policies, priorities and procedures. The facilitator will contribute to the first team meeting and the review visit. The facilitator will also be expected to play an active role through regular meetings which will provide opportunities for both the team and the college to seek further clarification outside of the formal meetings.

35 The facilitator will help to provide a constructive interaction between all participants in the review process. The development of an effective working relationship between QAA and the college through such liaison should help to ensure that the college does not go to unnecessary lengths in its preparation for the review. It should also help to avoid any misunderstanding by the college of QAA's expectations, or by QAA of the nature of the college or the scope of its provision.

## **Lead student representatives**

36 Where possible, there should also be a lead student representative. This role is voluntary. The lead student representative will receive copies of key correspondence from QAA, and be involved in the first team meeting and in the review visit to the college. The lead student representative will carry out the following key roles:

- liaising with the facilitator throughout the process to ensure smooth communication between the student body and the college
- disseminating information about the review to the student body
- organising or overseeing the writing of the student submission
- helping in the selection of students to meet the review team
- ensuring continuity of activity throughout the review process.

## **The role of awarding bodies**

37 Awarding bodies may wish to support their partner colleges through RCHE, by assisting, for example, with the preparation of the self-evaluation or by attending various events, including review visits. The extent of an awarding body's involvement with RCHE should be decided in discussion between the partners, taking account of the arrangement and the provisions of the partnership agreement and at the discretion of the organisations involved in the collaborative arrangements. The participation of the awarding body should be considered against the maturity of the relationship between the partners; the extent of the responsibilities which the awarding body has conferred on the college; and the accuracy and completeness of existing written evidence about these responsibilities.

38 RCHE teams will be pleased to meet awarding bodies' representatives at any stage of the process, and occasionally may encourage awarding body representatives to attend particular events should they regard it as likely to aid their understanding of the college's responsibilities. However, awarding bodies are not required to attend these events, since QAA has no desire to make unreasonable requests for awarding body involvement in a review which focuses on the responsibilities of colleges.

39 It is the responsibility of the colleges under review to keep their awarding bodies informed of the progress of the review and to make any requests for support. The only correspondence QAA will copy to awarding bodies is that associated with the draft and final reports.

## Part Two: How the method works

40 This part of the handbook explains the activities that need to be carried out to prepare for and take part in the review process. It is aimed at all colleges participating in review in 2012-13. Throughout this part of the handbook, 'we' refers to QAA and 'you' to the college undergoing review.

### Timeline

41 The timeline for the review process is given below. This shows what you need to do and when. Part of the preparation phase will have already been completed by the time this handbook is published.

#### Preparation phase

<b>June 2012</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>College provides information about academic year</li> <li>QAA sets dates for preparatory meetings, uploads of information and visits to colleges</li> </ul>
<b>25 September 2012</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Briefing event for colleges at QAA's offices in Gloucester</li> </ul>
<b>October 2012</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>QAA confirms name of QAA officer coordinating the review</li> <li>College nominates college facilitator (CF) and lead student representative (LSR)</li> </ul>
<b>November 2012</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>College informs QAA officer of preferred theme</li> </ul>
<b>December 2012</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>QAA confirms size of review team and names of team members</li> </ul>

#### Review phase

Working weeks	Cumulative weeks	
-16	0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Preparatory meeting between the college and QAA officer</li> </ul>
-11	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Document upload: college uploads to QAA secure folder information including the self-evaluation document (SED) and the student submission (SS)</li> </ul>
-7	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Team considers documentation remotely</li> </ul>
-6	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review team holds first team meeting at college (up to 1.5 days)</li> </ul>
-5	11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>QAA informs college of any further documentation required and confirms review visit details</li> <li>QAA confirms length of review visit</li> </ul>
0	16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review visit</li> </ul>

## Reporting phase

2	18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• QAA informs college and HEFCE and awarding body/ies of key findings</li> </ul>
6	22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• QAA sends draft report and evidence base to college</li> </ul>
9	25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• College provides factual corrections; QAA finalises report</li> </ul>
12	28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• QAA publishes report</li> </ul>
22	38	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• College publishes its action plan on its website</li> </ul>

## Dates for the review

42 By the time this handbook is published we will have already told you when the significant milestones of the review process will happen, including the review visits.

### Briefing event: 25 September 2012

43 On 25 September 2012 QAA will provide a briefing for colleges on their role and responsibilities. We will also explain how we anticipate that electronic information will be placed into the secure folder for the review (known as 'uploading'). We have already sent you an invitation for this event.

### Name of QAA officer and nominations of CF and LSR: October 2012

44 In October 2012 we will let you know the name of the QAA officer coordinating the review. You are welcome to phone or email your coordinating officer, or visit him or her at QAA if you need to understand the review process better. The QAA officer can provide advice about the review process but cannot act as a consultant for your preparation for review, or comment on whether the processes that you have for quality assurance are appropriate or fit for purpose: that is the job of the review team.

45 In October 2012 we will also ask you to nominate your college facilitator (CF) and lead student representative (LSR). We realise that it might be too early to know the name of the LSR. If this is the case then we ask that you let us know as soon as possible and preferably before the preparatory meeting.

### Selection of theme: November 2012

46 In November 2012 we will ask you to tell us which of the two themes described in paragraph 17 you would like the review to include. Where possible, the LSR and/or other student representatives should be consulted on the selection of the theme. The QAA officer will consider your proposal and confirm within one week which theme will be included.

### Size and composition of the review team: December 2012

47 In December 2012 we will let you know the size of the review team and the names of the team members. We will ask you to let us know of any potential conflicts of interest that members of the team might have with your college, and we may make adjustments accordingly.

## Online briefing

48 The online briefing includes details of the review process; roles of key players; guidance on the preparation of the SED and the SS; guidance on other documentation required; FAQs; and other guidance. We will expect all relevant colleagues in the college to have used the online briefing by the time that the preparatory meeting takes place (which is 16 weeks before the review). You will need to be confident by the preparatory meeting that production of your SED is in hand, or be comfortable with being able to prepare it in the five weeks between the preparatory meeting and document upload.

## Preparatory meeting - 16 weeks before your review visit

49 The preparatory meeting will take place about 16 weeks before the review visit. At the preparatory meeting the QAA officer coordinating the review will meet representatives of the college to discuss the structure of the review as a whole. The purpose of the meeting will be to answer any questions about the review process which remain after the online briefing, to agree the information to be made available by the college, and to confirm the detailed arrangements for the review. The meeting should, therefore, involve those who are most immediately involved with the production of the SED and the SS. In general, attendance by other staff should be confined to those with responsibility for the operational arrangements for the review. The CF and LSR should attend. If required, the QAA officer can give you further guidance about who should participate in the meeting.

50 The meeting will give an opportunity to discuss the likely interactions between the college, QAA and the review team; to confirm that the college's SED and SS will be well matched to the process of review; to emphasise that documentary evidence should be based primarily on existing material used in internal quality management, not on material prepared specially for the review; and to discuss any matters relating to information about the learning opportunities offered, including the required Wider Information Sets (WIS) and Key Information Sets (KIS). There will also be a discussion about the selection of the thematic element to be explored during the review. An agenda showing the kinds of items that might be included in a preparatory meeting is given in Annex 7.

51 The discussion about the SED will be particularly important. The usefulness of the SED to the review team will be one of the main factors that we will take into account when we decide on the length of your review. If the SED is reflective and well targeted to the areas of the review and the evidence carefully chosen, the greater the likelihood that the team will be able to verify your college's approaches and gather evidence of its own quickly and effectively. The same is true of the quality of accompanying documentation that you provide.

52 The structure of the first team visit will also be discussed and its outline agreed. The QAA officer will confirm this with you in writing shortly after the preparatory meeting.

53 The preparatory meeting will include discussion about the written submission to be prepared on behalf of the student body. Student representatives will need to have studied the review online briefing before the preparatory meeting, and to have contacted the QAA officer if additional clarification is needed. Discussion will include the scope and purpose of the SS and any topics beyond the standard template for the SS that the student representatives consider appropriate. It will also provide an important opportunity to liaise with the LSR (if identified at that point) about how students will be selected to meet the team. Where possible, we envisage the selection of students to be the responsibility of the LSR, but the LSR may choose to work in conjunction with the CF, or with other student

colleagues, if they so wish. After the preparatory meeting the QAA officer will be available to help clarify the process further, with either the CF or the LSR.

54 At the preparatory meeting the QAA officer will discuss the format of the first team visit, and will confirm the arrangements in writing with you shortly afterwards. The QAA officer will also discuss the mechanism for how the college's action plan will be drawn up after the review visit.

### **Uploading information - 11 weeks before your review visit**

55 At the preparatory meeting we will have clarified with you the information that the review teams will expect to find in the electronic review folder. We hope that you will also have got a good idea of what that information should include by reading this handbook. There are more details in Annex 4.

56 After the Preparatory meeting you will need upload your SED, accompanying documentation and required information to the secure electronic folder. The precise mechanism and date for doing this will have been explained at the CF/LSR briefing and recapped by your QAA officer at the preparatory meeting.

57 Information about the requirements for the SED is given in Annex 3. If you are unsure about the format of the SED you can contact your QAA officer. We will expect the SED to adhere to advice about page limits. Similarly the LSR (or other appointed students' representative) can talk to the QAA officer about the form and content of the SS (see Annex 6).

58 We envisage that much of the information that will need to be uploaded will consist of the college's information about the learning opportunities it offers including the required WIS, KIS, and other documentation available on intranets or extranets. (See the list in Annex 4 for what we expect to be available.) However, you will also need to bear in mind that some categories of information, while available in the college, may not normally be available online, and so provision will need to be made to upload those documents to the QAA secure electronic folder as well.

59 The review team will review the SED, accompanying documentation, and information about learning opportunities that the college has uploaded to the QAA secure electronic folder. This will allow team members to reach an overview of the information, and to become familiar with the college's quality assurance processes before its first team visit. The team will post preliminary comments on the college's processes and its information about learning opportunities it offers to the QAA secure electronic folder.

### **First team visit - six weeks before your review visit**

60 Six weeks before the review visit there will be a visit to the college, of up to a day and a half, for the team to discuss its initial comments, decide on issues for exploration, any extra documentation needed, and a programme for the review visit. The format and arrangements will have been confirmed by the QAA officer following the preparatory meeting.

61 The first team visit will include meetings with the head of the college, student representatives, and some staff members. The requirements will have been discussed at the preparatory meeting. The QAA officer will be present throughout the first team visit to ensure that the review process is adhered to and to support the team in the process.

62 The CF and LSR will be invited to parts of the first team visit and their involvement will have been discussed at the preparatory meeting. We suggest that the CF and LSR join the review team at lunch on the first day of the visit. We do not expect that the CF and LSR will be present with the team for all of its private meetings, nor in the meetings it has with staff or students, but we do expect the team to have regular contact with them - perhaps at the beginning and end of the day, or when invited to meet the team at other times to clarify evidence or provide information. The CF and LSR can also suggest informal meetings to alert the team to information it might have missed. We want this to be an informal but productive relationship, helping the review team to have speedy access to the kind of information that will help it come to robust and clear findings. There is more information about the roles of the CF and LSR in Annex 5 and Annex 6.

63 The final decision concerning the length of the review visit will be made after this first team visit, and will be relayed to you by the QAA officer.

### **Confirmation of the review visit schedule - five weeks before your review visit**

64 One week after the first team visit the QAA officer will confirm with the college the plan of activity for the review visit, and its length. At this stage we will ask you to plan meetings with colleagues whom the review team wishes to meet. The QAA officer will liaise with the LSR to ensure that the student groups that the team wishes to meet will be available.

65 Before the review visit we will confirm practical details for the review visit, including the length of the visit, and ask you to ensure that IT provision and any necessary conferencing facility is up and working. If you have any questions at this stage - as for any part of the review - you can contact your QAA officer or the administrative officer assigned to your review.

### **The review visit - week 0**

66 The review team will normally arrive at its accommodation on the evening before the review is due to start. Review activity will, therefore, begin first thing on day one of the review. You will be familiar with the programme for the review by this time and will know what meetings and other activities are envisaged.

67 The programme of activity will extend from two days to a maximum of four days and will be tailored to the complexity of the provision, the clarity and usefulness of the SED to the review team, the information provided by the college, and emerging issues identified by the team.

68 The activity carried out at the visit will not be the same for every review but may include contact with staff, external examiners, awarding body staff, recent graduates, and employers. The review team will ensure that its programme includes meetings with a wide variety of students, to enable it to gain first-hand information on students' experience as learners and on their engagement with the college's quality assurance and enhancement processes. The team will meet with a range of students including, where appropriate, those who have been involved with the preparation of the SS.

69 The programme will include a final meeting between the team and senior staff of the college, the CF and the LSR. This will not be a feedback meeting, but will be an opportunity for the team to summarise the major themes and issues that it has pursued (and may still be pursuing). The intention will be to give the college a final opportunity to offer clarification and/or present evidence that will help the team come to secure review findings.

70 Activities in the college will be carried out by at least two review team members, although it is envisaged that most activities will involve the whole team. Where the team splits for an activity there will be catch-up time afterwards so that all members of the team have a shared understanding of what has been found.

71 As with the first team visit, the CF and LSR will be invited to contribute to the review visit and their involvement will have been discussed at the preparatory meeting. The CF and LSR will not be present with the team for its private meetings nor in the meetings with employers, staff or students, but we do expect the team to have regular contact with the CF and LSR, perhaps at the beginning and end of the day, or when they are invited to clarify evidence or provide information. The CF and LSR can also suggest informal meetings if they want to alert the team to information which it might find useful.

72 On the final day of the review visit, the review team considers its findings in order to:

- decide on the grades of the four judgements
- decide on the commentary on the thematic element of the review
- agree any features of good practice that it wishes to highlight as making a contribution to the management of academic standards and quality of provision
- agree any recommendations for action by the college
- agree any affirmations of courses of action that the college has already identified.

73 You can find more detail about the expectations that teams use to make judgements in Annex 2.

74 The QAA officer will be present during the review visit and will chair meetings of the team. However, they will not direct the team's deliberations nor lead it as it comes to its conclusions and findings. On the last day of the review the QAA officer will test the evidence base for the team's findings.

### **After the review - reports**

75 Two weeks after the end of the review a letter setting out the provisional key findings will be sent to you, HEFCE and your awarding body/ies. After a further four weeks you will receive the draft report and the evidence base for the findings. We expect you to share the report and evidence base with the LSR. We will ask you to respond within three weeks, telling us of any factual errors or errors of interpretation in the report and/or evidence base.

76 Where the draft report confirms that academic standards 'meet UK expectations' and that the quality of student learning opportunities, the quality of the information produced by the college about its learning opportunities, and the enhancement of student learning opportunities all either 'meet UK expectations' or are 'commended', the report will be finalised and published three weeks later (that is, within 12 working weeks of the review visit).

77 Where the draft report contains judgements of 'requires improvement to meet UK expectations' or 'does not meet UK expectations' in any of the four judgement areas, we will prepare a second draft within three weeks of receiving your comments on the first draft and send it back for your consideration before it is published. This is to allow you to consider whether you wish to appeal the judgements. Any appeal should be made within one month of receipt of the second draft report, and should be based on that second draft and the underlying evidence base. An appeal based on a first draft report and evidence base will not



be considered. QAA will not publish a report, meet a third party request for disclosure of the report or the evidence base, or consider a college's action plan while an appeal is pending or is under consideration. Please refer to the procedure on appeals for further information.

78 The review's findings (judgements, recommendations, features of good practice and affirmations) will be decided by the review team as peer reviewers. The QAA officer will ensure that all findings are backed by adequate and identifiable evidence, and that the review report provides information in a succinct and readily accessible form. To this end QAA will retain editorial responsibility for the final report and will moderate reports to promote consistency.

79 The report will be written as concisely as possible while including enough explanation for it to make sense to an audience not necessarily familiar with the concepts and operation of higher education. The intention is to produce a report of about 10 pages in length. The report will not contain detailed evidence for the findings: this will be provided for the college in the evidence base. The report will contain a summary in a format accessible to members of the public.

80 The format of the report will follow a template that aligns with the structure recommended for the college's SED (see Annex 3a) and SS (see Annex 6). Its production will be coordinated by the QAA officer.

### **Action planning and sign-off**

81 After the report has been published you will be expected to provide an action plan, signed off by the head of the college, responding to the recommendations and affirmations, and giving any plans to capitalise on the identified good practice. You should either produce this jointly with student representatives, or representatives should be able to post their own commentary on the action plan. The QAA officer will have discussed this process with you at the preparatory meeting. The action plan (and commentary, if produced) should be posted to your college's public website within one academic term or semester after the review report is published. A link to the report page on QAA's website should also be provided. You will be expected to update the action plan annually, again in conjunction with student representatives, until actions have been completed, and post the updated plan to your website.

82 The review will be completed when it is formally 'signed off'. Where the review report offers 'commended' or 'meets' judgements in all four areas, the review will be formally signed off on publication of the initial action plan. Upon sign-off, colleges who subscribe to QAA will be allowed to place the licensed QAA quality mark on their website, subject to terms and conditions. For more information please see [www.qaa.ac.uk/AboutUs/corporate/Policies/Pages/logo-licensing.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/AboutUs/corporate/Policies/Pages/logo-licensing.aspx).

### **Exception reporting follow-up**

83 Three years after the review visit we will ask you to report back to us on the review action plan, noting only those areas (exceptions) where you have not been able to meet the objectives of the action plan. A concise tabulated format, providing references to evidence, will be adequate for these purposes. We will not ask you to provide any accompanying documentation in the first instance. If you have dealt with all the review findings this will have become evident in your annual updates and the work for mid-cycle follow-up will be negligible. We expect you to involve students' representatives in preparing the mid-cycle report.

84 QAA will review your exception report to ensure that recommendations are being followed up or have been dealt with. In some instances we may choose to follow up some of the evidence links that you provide.

85 If, without good reason, you do not provide an action plan within the required timescale, or if you fail to engage seriously with review recommendations, your college may be referred to QAA's Concerns procedure. Future review teams will take into account the progress made on the actions from the previous review.

### **Full follow-up**

86 Where a review team makes a judgement of 'requires improvement to meet' or 'does not meet' in one or more areas of the review, the report will be published and there will then follow a formal programme of follow-up activity to address the recommendations of the review.

### **If a judgement of 'requires improvement' is given in any area**

87 If you receive a 'requires improvement' judgement you will be asked to produce, within one academic term/semester of the report's publication, an action plan to address the review findings. We will expect this to be more detailed than the action plan required for a 'meets' judgement since it will need to explain how the identified weaknesses or risks that are germane to the 'requires improvement' judgement are to be addressed within one year of the publication of the review report.

88 We will ask you to submit your action plan to your QAA officer, who will plan with you a series of progress reports to be provided over the following year. Both the action plan and the progress reports should be drawn up jointly with student representatives. If reports are received on time and show that progress has been made in dealing with the review findings, QAA will arrange for a peer visit to establish whether the judgement can be changed to 'meets'. If this is the case, the judgement will be changed and the review signed off. Colleges who subscribe to QAA will then be able to use the QAA quality mark as mentioned in paragraph 82.

89 If after one year peers do not feel that sufficient progress has been made in dealing with the review findings, you will be required to take part in the next level of follow-up: that for a 'does not meet' judgement.

### **If a judgement of 'does not meet' is given in any area**

90 If you receive a judgement of 'does not meet' in any area, or if you do not make sufficient progress in dealing with a 'requires improvement' judgement, you will be asked to provide an action plan detailing planned improvements to deal with the weaknesses or risks identified in the review that are germane to the 'does not meet' or 'requires improvement' judgement. In addition, the action plan should show how the college plans to review and strengthen quality assurance structures, processes and policies to limit the risk of such a judgement being delivered in future.

91 We will ask you to submit your action plan to your QAA officer within one academic term/semester of the review report's publication or the peer visit report. The QAA officer will plan with you a series of progress reports to be provided over the following year. Both the action plan and the progress reports should be drawn up jointly with student representatives. If reports are received on time and show that progress has been made in dealing with the review findings, QAA will arrange for a second review to take place. We reserve the right to

charge colleges for this activity. If the second review returns 'commended' or 'meets' judgements in all areas, the judgement(s) will be changed accordingly and the review signed off. Colleges who subscribe to QAA will then be able to use the QAA quality mark as mentioned in paragraph 82.

92 If at the second review any judgement of less than 'meets' is achieved, or if insufficient progress is made to make holding a second review worthwhile, HEFCE's policy for dealing with unsatisfactory quality will be invoked. This policy sets out a range of possible actions that might be taken, including, as a last resort, to withdraw funding from an institution.

## **Complaints and appeals**

93 QAA has formal processes for receiving complaints and appeals. Details of these processes are available on the QAA website.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/Complaints/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Complaints/Pages/default.aspx)

## Annex 1

### Definitions of key terms

#### What do we mean by threshold academic standards?

These are defined in the *UK Quality Code for Higher Education: General introduction* as follows:

Threshold academic standards are the minimum acceptable level of achievement that a student has to demonstrate to be eligible for an academic award. For equivalent awards, the threshold level of achievement should be the same across the UK. Individual awarding bodies are responsible for setting the grades, marks or classification that differentiate between levels of student achievement above the threshold academic standard within an individual award.

Threshold standards are distinct from the standards of performance that a student would need to achieve to gain any particular class of award. Threshold standards do not relate to any individual award classification in any particular subject. They dictate the standard required to be able to label an award, for instance, 'Foundation Degree', 'bachelor's' or 'master's'.

The threshold standards, as reflected in levels of achievement, are set out in the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code),<sup>3</sup> and in particular in *Chapter A1: The national level* containing *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and *Chapter A2: The subject and qualification level* on subject benchmark statements.

The FHEQ includes descriptors for each qualification which set out the generic outcomes and attributes expected for the award of that qualification.

Subject benchmark statements describe the principles, nature and scope of a particular subject, the subject knowledge, the subject-specific skills and generic skills to be developed, and the forms of teaching, learning and assessment that may be expected. The statements also set the minimum threshold standard that is acceptable within that subject. They relate mainly to bachelor's and honours degrees (level 6). In addition there is a *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark* that applies to all Foundation Degrees.<sup>4</sup>

In determining how well colleges manage the threshold standards of awards, review teams will expect to see awards aligned to the threshold standards set out in the FHEQ, and in the relevant subject benchmark statement, where available.

In addition, professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) set standards for courses that they accredit. Where colleges claim PSRB accreditation for their programmes, review teams will explore how accreditation requirements are taken into account in the setting of standards and how accurate expectations about accreditation are conveyed to students.

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<sup>3</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/AssuringStandardsAndQuality/quality-code/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/AssuringStandardsAndQuality/quality-code/Pages/default.aspx)

<sup>4</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Foundation-Degree-qualification-benchmark-May-2010.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Foundation-Degree-qualification-benchmark-May-2010.aspx)

## What do we mean by learning opportunities?

Learning opportunities should be considered in the wider context of academic quality which is defined in the *UK Quality Code for Higher Education: General introduction*.

Academic quality is concerned with how well the learning opportunities made available to students enable them to achieve their award. It is about making sure that appropriate and effective teaching, support, assessment and learning resources are provided for them. In order to achieve a higher education award, students participate in the learning opportunities made available to them by their higher education provider.

Learning opportunities are what a college provides in order to enable a student to achieve what is required to qualify for an award. Learning opportunities include the teaching that students receive in their courses or programmes of study, as well as academic and personal support. Learning resources (such as IT or libraries), admissions structures, student support, and staff development all contribute to the quality of learning opportunities, just as the content of the actual course or programme does. We use the term 'learning opportunities' rather than 'learning experience' because while we consider that a college should be capable of guaranteeing the quality of the opportunities it provides, it cannot guarantee how any particular student will experience those opportunities.

## What do we mean by information about learning opportunities?

Part C: Information about higher education provision of the Quality Code was published in March 2012. It sets out the Expectation concerning information about the learning opportunities offered that all higher education colleges are required to meet:

Higher education providers produce information for their intended audiences about the learning opportunities they offer that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

This information is for the public at large, prospective students, current students, students who have completed their studies and those with responsibility for academic standards and quality.

Part C also sets out Indicators of sound practice, with accompanying explanations, which suggest ways in which higher education providers may wish to demonstrate that they are meeting the Expectation.

One outcome of the 2009 consultation on the future of the quality assurance system was that, in future, reviews should include a judgement on information about higher education provision. The consultation was also clear that the judgement should not be brought in until the Key and Wider Information Sets, to be included in the judgement, had been agreed. These information sets were agreed in 2011 and are set out in a joint report of HEFCE, UniversitiesUK and GuildHE: *Provision of information about higher education* (HEFCE 2011/18).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> [www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2011/201118](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2011/201118)

HEFCE 2011/18 makes it clear that colleges should:

- publish Key Information Sets (KIS) for undergraduate courses, whether full or part-time. The KIS will contain information on student satisfaction, graduate outcomes, learning and teaching activities, assessment methods, tuition fees and student finance, accommodation, and professional accreditation
- publish a Wider Information Set (WIS).

More details of the content of the KIS and the WIS are given in HEFCE 2011/18.

While reviewers are not expected to make a judgement on the statistical accuracy of the detailed information in the KIS, they will consider the KIS and the WIS in their judgement on whether the college's information about the learning opportunities offered is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

### **What do we mean by enhancement?**

For the purposes of Review of College Higher Education (RCHE), we will expect review teams to use the definition of enhancement that we use in our reviews of higher education institutions in England: 'taking deliberate steps at institutional level to improve the quality of learning opportunities'. This definition means that enhancement is more than a collection of examples of good practice which might spring up across a college. It is about a college being aware that it has a responsibility to improve the quality of learning opportunities where that is necessary, and to have policies, structures and processes in place to make sure that it can detect where improvement is necessary and then take appropriate action. It means that the willingness to consider enhancement stems from a high-level awareness of the need for improvement and is embedded throughout the college.

The *UK Quality Code for Higher Education: General Introduction* offers a wider description of enhancement as:

the process by which higher education providers systematically improve the quality of provision and the ways in which students' learning is supported. This can take place in different ways and at different levels, but a higher education provider should be aware that it has a responsibility to improve the quality of learning opportunities and to have policies, structures and processes in place to detect where improvement is necessary. Willingness to consider enhancement should be embedded throughout the higher education provider, but should stem from a high-level awareness of the need to consider improvement. Quality enhancement should naturally form part of effective quality assurance.

### **What do we mean by good practice?**

A feature of good practice is a process or way of working that, in the view of a QAA review team, makes a particularly positive contribution to the following judgement areas: the college's management of its academic standards; the quality and/or enhancement of the learning opportunities it provides for students; and the fitness for purpose, accessibility and trustworthiness of the information it produces.

### **What is an affirmation?**

An affirmation is recognition of an action that is already taking place in a college to improve a recognised weakness or inadequacy in the following judgement areas: the management of its academic standards; the quality and/or enhancement of the learning opportunities it

provides for students; and the fitness for purpose, accessibility and trustworthiness of the information it produces.

### **What is a recommendation?**

Review teams make recommendations where they agree that a college should consider changing a process or procedure in order to: safeguard academic standards; assure the quality of or take deliberate steps to enhance the learning opportunities it provides for students; and to improve the fitness for purpose, accessibility and trustworthiness of the information it produces.

### **Information requirements and new subscribers**

QAA is aware that it may take some time for new QAA subscribers to establish appropriate student administration systems to provide information in a format expected by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), and for HESA to provide statistics that can be made available to QAA review teams. In addition, the requirements for the Key Information Sets, to be introduced in September 2012, will be based on existing statistical information from the National Student Survey (NSS) (2010-11) and the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education survey (DLHE). Most new subscribers will not have information from these sources.

Over 2011-12, these providers will discuss with HESA their readiness to supply the KIS and will agree a roadmap that can be shared with QAA. To this end, QAA and HESA have agreed that new subscribers can provide a partial KIS dataset based on [www.hesa.ac.uk/New\\_KIS\\_Course](http://www.hesa.ac.uk/New_KIS_Course) in 2012-13 for publication in September 2013. The providers will need to assess with HESA the appropriate timing for moving to a full KIS depending on their readiness for the necessary provision of student data and participation in the NSS and DLHE surveys. Any exceptions to providing a full KIS depending on student profile and course profile will need to be agreed in advance between the providers, QAA and HESA.

## Annex 2

### Format of judgements

There are four judgements in Review of College Higher Education (RCHE).

In order for a college to meet a judgement, review teams will see whether certain expectations that apply to all UK institutions are being met. To help the team come to its decision, we have set out below what those expectations are for the purposes of review, and some of the considerations that teams will need to discuss to arrive at a particular decision. The expectations have been drawn from the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code). The tables also talk about 'factors' - we explain these further below.

At this point it is worth re-emphasising the fact that none of the colleges under review in 2012-13 have powers to award their own higher education qualifications. The colleges work with awarding bodies, which 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 are adequate to enable students to achieve the academic standards required for their awards. RCHE is concerned with the way colleges discharge the responsibilities they have to their awarding bodies. It is not concerned with how awarding bodies manage their responsibilities for collaborative arrangements. RCHE reviewers will reach their judgements and other findings within this context and by reference to the requirements of the college's awarding body/ies. The reviewers will not consider those factors for which the awarding body is solely responsible.

#### 1 The academic standards of the awards the college offers on behalf of its awarding bodies...

The 'standards' judgement has two grades: standards either 'meet UK expectations for threshold standards' or 'do not meet UK expectations for threshold standards'. Below is the guidance that teams will use to come to these judgements.

##### **...meet UK expectations for threshold standards**

All, or nearly all, expectations have been met.

Expectations not met do not, individually or collectively, present any material risks to the management of academic standards.

Recommendations may relate, for example, to:

- minor omissions or oversights
- a need to amend or update details in documentation, where the

##### **...do not meet UK expectations for threshold standards**

Several expectations have not been met or there are major gaps in one or more key areas of the expectations.

Expectations not met present serious risk(s) individually or collectively to the management of academic standards, and limited controls are in place to mitigate the risk. Consequences of inaction in some areas may be severe.

Recommendations may relate, for example, to:

- ineffective operation of parts of the college's governance structure (as it relates to quality assurance)



- amendment will not require or result in major structural, operational or procedural change
- completion of activity that is already underway in a small number of areas that will allow it to meet the factors more fully.

The need for action has been acknowledged by the college in its review documentation or during the review, **and** it has provided clear evidence of appropriate action being taken within a reasonable timescale.

There is evidence that the college is fully aware of its responsibilities for assuring standards and quality: previous responses to external review/audit activities provide confidence that areas of weakness will be addressed promptly and professionally.

- significant gaps in policy, structures or procedures relating to the college's quality assurance
- breaches by the college of its own quality assurance management procedures.

Plans for addressing identified problems that the college presents before or at the review are not adequate to rectify the problems, or there is very little or no evidence of progress.

The college has limited understanding of the responsibilities associated with one or more key areas of the criteria or is not fully in control of what happens in all parts of the organisation.

**2 The quality of student learning opportunities...**

**3 The quality of the information produced by the college about its learning opportunities...**

**4 The enhancement of student learning opportunities...**

These judgements have four grades that can be awarded: 'is commended', 'meets UK expectations', 'requires improvement to meet UK expectations', and 'does not meet UK expectations'. Below is the guidance that teams will use to come to these judgements.

**...is commended**

All, or nearly all, expectations have been met.

Expectations not met do not, individually or collectively, present any material risks to the management of this area.

**...meets UK expectations**

All, or nearly all, expectations have been met.

Expectations not met do not, individually or collectively, present any material risks to the management of this area.

**...requires improvement to meet UK expectations**

Most expectations have been met.

Expectations not met do not present any immediate or serious risks. Some moderate risks may exist which, without action, could lead to serious problems over time with the management of this area.

**...does not meet UK expectations**

Several expectations have not been met or there are major gaps in one or more of the expectations.

Expectations not met present serious risk(s) individually or collectively to the management of this area, and limited controls are in place to mitigate the risk. Consequences of inaction in some areas may be severe.

- The review identifies numerous and widespread examples of good practice in the management of this area.
- The college has plans to improve this area further.
- There is substantial evidence from outside the college that the college is sector-leading in this area.
- Student engagement in the management of this area is widespread and supported.
- Managing the needs of students is a prime and clear focus of the college's strategies and policies in this area.

- Recommendations may relate, for example, to:
- minor omissions or oversights
  - a need to amend or update details in documentation, where the amendment will not require or result in major structural, operational or procedural change
  - completion of activity that is already underway in a small number of areas that will allow it to meet the factors more fully.

The need for action has been acknowledged by the college in its review documentation or during the review, **and** it has provided clear evidence of appropriate action being taken within a reasonable timescale.

There is evidence that the college is fully aware of its responsibilities for assuring quality: previous responses to external review activities provide confidence that areas of weakness will be addressed promptly and professionally.

- Recommendations may relate, for example, to:
- weakness in the operation of part of the college's governance structure (as it relates to quality assurance) or lack of clarity about responsibilities
  - insufficient emphasis or priority given to assuring quality in the college's planning processes
  - quality assurance procedures which, while broadly adequate, have some shortcomings in terms of the rigour with which they are applied.

Plans that the college presents for addressing identified problems before or at the review are under-developed or not fully embedded in the college's operational planning.

The college's priorities or recent actions suggest that it may not be fully aware of the significance of certain factors. However, previous responses to external review activities suggest that it will take the required actions and provide evidence of action, as requested.

- Recommendations may relate, for example, to:
- ineffective operation of parts of the college's governance structure (as it relates to quality assurance)
  - significant gaps in policy, structures or procedures relating to the college's quality assurance
  - breaches by the college of its own quality assurance management procedures.

Plans for addressing identified problems that the college may present before or at the review are not adequate to rectify the problems or there is very little or no evidence of progress.

The college has not recognised that it has major problems, or has not planned significant action to address problems it has identified.

The college has limited understanding of the responsibilities associated with one or more key areas of the

factors; or may not be fully in control of all parts of the organisation.

The college has repeatedly or persistently failed to take appropriate action in response to previous external review activities.

When teams make their judgements they will take into account whether broad **expectations** have been met. These expectations are in turn made up of **factors** which will help reviewers decide whether expectations have been met. The factors act as guidance for the sorts of processes, structures, policies, procedures and outputs which an institution should have in place to safeguard standards and quality. Both the expectations and the factors derive directly from the reference points in the Quality Code and other external reference points. The factors are not a checklist. Reviewers will appreciate that the precise details of how an expectation might be addressed may vary from college to college and according to colleges' agreements with their awarding bodies.

The references given below reflect the fact that from 2012/13 higher education providers and reviewers will refer to the Quality Code in reviews and not to the Academic Infrastructure. The Expectations contained in the Chapters and Part C of the Quality Code are indicative until each Chapter has been developed/revised, and until higher education providers have had an agreed period of time in which to engage with the new or revised Chapter and Expectation and make appropriate changes to their practices and procedures. Therefore as each Expectation is finalised it will be integrated into the Review of College Higher Education expectations below. Prior to that, RCHE expectations are worded as far as possible not to cause confusion with the Quality Code.

## 1 Standards

### Expectations

(1) Each qualification (including those awarded under collaborative arrangements) is allocated to the appropriate level in the FHEQ.

Reference points:

Quality Code - *Chapter A1: The national level* (FHEQ)

Other sources of information:

### Factors (for further explanation, see the reference points)

- Whether outcomes of programmes match the expectations of the qualification descriptors.
- Whether there is sufficient volume of study to demonstrate that learning outcomes can be achieved.

*Higher education credit framework for England: guidance on academic credit arrangements in higher education in England (2008)*

(2) Higher education providers make scrupulous use of external examiners.

Reference points:

Quality Code - *Chapter B7: External examining*

Quality Code - *Chapter B10: Management of collaborative arrangements* (Indicators 21-23, 25-28)

Quality Code - *Chapter B3: Learning and teaching* (Indicators 7-8, 9-12)

(3) Design, approval, monitoring and review of assessment strategies is effective in ensuring that students have the opportunity to demonstrate learning outcomes of the award.

Reference points:

Quality Code - *Chapter A6: Assessment of achievement of learning outcomes*

Quality Code - *Chapter B1: Programme design and approval*

Quality Code - *Chapter B4: Student support, learning resources and careers education, information, advice and guidance* (Section 2, Indicator 12)

Quality Code - *Chapter B6: Assessment of students and accreditation of prior learning*

Quality Code - *Chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review*

Quality Code - *Chapter B10: Management of collaborative arrangements* (Indicator 20)

Quality Code - *Chapter B3: Learning and teaching* (Indicators 19-20)

Quality Code - *Chapter B11: Research degrees* (Indicators 22-24)

(4) Design, approval, monitoring and review of programmes enables standards to be set and maintained and allows students

- Defining the role of the external examiner
- The nomination and appointment of external examiners
- Carrying out the role of the external examiner
- Recognition of the work of external examiners
- External examiners' reports
- Serious concerns

- Input of assessment to student learning
- How panels and boards work
- Conduct of assessment
- Amount and timing of assessment
- Marking and grading
- Feedback to students
- Staff development and training in assessment
- Language of study
- PSRB requirements
- Regulations
- Student conduct
- Recording and documentation of assessment

- Exercise of authority
- Use of externality

to demonstrate learning outcomes of the award.

Reference points:

Quality Code - *Chapter B1: Programme design and approval*

Quality Code - *Chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review*

(5) Subject benchmark statements and qualification statements are used effectively in programme design, approval, delivery and review to inform standards of awards.

Reference points:

Quality Code - *Chapter A2: The subject and qualification level*  
(subject benchmark statements)

*Foundation Degree qualification benchmark*

Quality Code - *Chapter B10: Management of collaborative arrangements* (Indicators 5, 14)

Quality Code - *Chapter B3: Learning and teaching* (Indicators 2, 4)

- Articulation of policy and practice
- Programme design
- Programme approval
- Programme monitoring and review
- Evaluation of processes
- Are subject benchmark statements and qualification statements used in design and delivery and as general guidance when setting learning outcomes?
- Is there effective consideration of the relationship between standards in subject benchmark statements and any required for PSRBs?

## 2 Quality

### Expectations

(1) Professional standards for teaching and support of learning are upheld.

Reference points:

Quality Code - *Chapter B3: Learning and teaching* (especially Section 1, Indicator 16 and Section 2, Indicator 7)

Quality Code - *Chapter B10: Management of collaborative arrangements* (Indicator 17)

Other sources of information:

UK professional standards framework

(2) Learning resources are appropriate to allow students to achieve the learning outcomes of their programmes.

Reference points:

Quality Code - *Chapter B4: Student support, learning resources and careers education, information, advice and guidance* (Section 2, Indicators 3, 11, 14, 18, 19)

Other sources of information:

Quality Code - *Chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review* (Appendix 3)

(3) Students contribute effectively to quality assurance.

Reference points:

Quality Code - *Chapter B5: Student engagement* (to be published in June 2012)

### Factors (for further explanation, see the reference points)

- Teachers can demonstrate an understanding of the student learning environment.
  - Research, scholarship and/or professional practice is incorporated in teaching activity.
  - Experienced teachers support and mentor less experienced colleagues.
  - Staff and others involved in delivering or supporting programmes are appropriately qualified.
- 
- The collective expertise of the staff is suitable and available for effective delivery of the curricula, for the overall teaching, learning and assessment strategy, and for the achievement of the intended learning outcomes.
  - Appropriate staff development opportunities are available.
  - Appropriate technical and administrative support is available.
  - There is an overall strategy for the deployment of learning resources.
  - Learning is effectively facilitated by the provision of resources.
  - Teaching and learning accommodation is suitable.
  - Subject book and periodical stocks are appropriate and accessible.
  - Suitable equipment and appropriate information technology facilities are available to learners.
  - Students are represented on the college's decision-making bodies both at central and local levels.
  - Students are supported in making their voices heard in decision-making bodies, for example through training or briefing.
  - There are close links between senior college managers and students' representative bodies.

(4) There is effective use of management information to safeguard quality and standards and to promote enhancement of student learning opportunities.

Reference points:

Quality Code Part C: Information about higher education provision (Indicator 9)

Quality Code - *Chapter B4: Student support, learning resources and careers education, information, advice and guidance* (Section 1, Indicator 13 and Section 2, Indicators 3-4)

Quality Code - *Chapter B9: Complaints and appeals* (Indicator 9)

Quality Code - *Chapter B10: Management of collaborative arrangements* (Indicator 27)

Quality Code - *Chapter B11: Research degrees* (Indicator 4)

(5) Policies and procedures used to admit students are clear, fair, explicit and consistently applied.

Reference point:

Quality Code - *Chapter B2: Admissions* (Indicators 1-9, 12)

(6) There are effective complaints and appeals procedures.

- Effective arrangements are in place to gather feedback from students on their learning experience and to act on that feedback.
- The results of the National Student Survey (NSS) are used for enhancement of students' learning opportunities.
- Efforts are made to gain the views of 'hard-to-reach' students such as those studying part-time or off-campus.
- The effectiveness of the college's policies and procedures for promoting the contribution of students to quality assurance and enhancement are regularly reviewed.
- There are centrally administered policies and systems to allow the collection of relevant management information.
- Management information is considered at appropriate intervals by senior decision-making bodies to inform enhancement.
- The following information, in particular, is collected and reviewed:
  - information is collected by colleges on disclosure of impairments and is used appropriately to monitor the applications, admissions and academic progress of disabled students
  - systems operate to monitor the effectiveness of provision for disabled students, to evaluate progress and to identify opportunities for enhancement
  - there are effective arrangements to monitor, evaluate and improve the effectiveness of student complaints and appeals procedures and to reflect on their outcomes for enhancement purposes
  - relevant data and information is used to inform career education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) provision.
- General principles
- Recruitment and selection
- Information for applicants
- Monitoring of policies and procedures
- General principles

Reference points:

Quality Code - *Chapter B2: Admissions* (Indicators 10-11)

Quality Code - *Chapter B3: Learning and teaching* (Section 1 Indicator 10)

Quality Code - *Chapter B9: Complaints and appeals*

Quality Code - *Chapter B10: Management of collaborative arrangements* (Indicator 26)

Quality Code - *Chapter B11: Research degrees* (Indicators 25-27)

(7) There is an approach to career education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) that is adequately quality assured.

Reference point:

Quality Code - *Chapter B4: Student support, learning resources and careers education, information, advice and guidance* (Section 1)

(8) The quality of learning opportunities is managed to enable the entitlements of disabled students to be met.

Reference point:

Quality Code - *Chapter B4: Student support, learning resources and careers education, information, advice and guidance* (Section 2)

- Information
- Internal procedures
- Appropriate action
- Access to support and advice
- Monitoring, review and enhancement of complaints procedures
- Briefing and support

- General principles
- Curriculum design
- Students
- Stakeholder relations
- Staff
- Monitoring, feedback, evaluation and improvement

- General principles
- Institutional and strategic management
- Planning, monitoring and evaluation
- Continuing professional development
- Information for prospective students, current students and staff
- Admissions processes and policies
- Enrolment, registration and induction of students
- Curriculum design
- Learning and teaching
- Academic support
- ICT
- Access to student services
- Additional specialist support
- Careers education, information and guidance
- Physical environment
- Facilities and equipment
- Institutional procedures



(9) The quality of learning opportunities for international students is appropriate.

Relevant sources of information:

*International students studying in the UK - Guidance for UK higher education providers (2012)*

(10) The quality of learning opportunities delivered as part of collaborative arrangements is managed effectively to enable students to achieve their awards.

Reference points:

Quality Code - Chapter B10: Management of collaborative arrangements

(11) The quality of learning opportunities delivered through flexible and distributed arrangements, including e-learning, is managed effectively.

Reference point:

Quality Code - *Chapter B3: Learning and teaching* (Indicators 1-6)

(12) The quality of learning opportunities delivered through work-based and placement learning is effective.

Reference point:

Quality Code - *Chapter B3: Learning and teaching* (Section 2, Indicators 1, 3-8)

(13) A document setting out the mutual expectations of the college and its students, which may take the form of a student

- How the college has ensured that its policies, structures and procedures have been applied appropriately to support the quality of learning opportunities for international students.

- Policies, procedures and information
- Selecting a partner or agent
- Written agreements with a partner or agent
- Assuring quality of the programme
- Information for students
- Certificate and transcripts
- Publicity and marketing
- Awareness of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the Higher Education Area

- Delivery
- Learner support

- General principles
- Responsibilities of partners
- Responsibilities and entitlements of students
- Students
- Partners
- Staff development
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Students know broadly what they can expect, what is required of them, and what to do if things do not meet expected standards.

charter or equivalent document, is available.

Reference point:

Quality Code - Part C: Information about higher education provision (Indicator 5)

- The charter covers all students: undergraduate, postgraduate, taught and research students.
- The charter includes clear signposting, for example to appeals and complaints procedures.
- The charter is regularly reviewed by the college and students' union officers.
- There is a clear communication and dissemination strategy for the charter which is reviewed regularly.

### 3 Information about the learning opportunities offered

#### Expectations

(1) Higher education providers produce information for their intended audiences about the learning opportunities they offer that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

Reference points:

Quality Code - Part C: Information about higher education provision

HEFCE 2011/18: Table 1 and Table 2

HEFCE 2012/04 Circular

#### Factors (for further explanation, see the reference points)

- There are effective mechanisms for making sure that the following information is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy:
  - 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.
- The information detailed in HEFCE 2011/18, and in particular the Key Information Set (KIS) and the Wider Information Set (WIS), is up to date, and accessible to the college's stakeholders.
- External examiners' reports are shared as a matter of course with the college's student representatives, for example through staff-student committees.

### 4 Enhancement

#### Expectations

(1) Deliberate steps are being taken at an institutional level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities.

Other sources of information:

*Outcomes from institutional audit: Institutions' intentions for enhancement*

*Quality enhancement and assurance - a changing picture?* (QAA, HEA, HEFCE, June 2008)

#### Factors (for further explanation, see the reference points)

- There is a strategic approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities.
- Enhancement initiatives are integrated in a systematic and planned manner at college level.
- There is an ethos which expects and encourages enhancement of student learning opportunities.
- Good practice is identified, supported and disseminated.
- Quality assurance procedures are used to identify opportunities for enhancement.

## Annex 3

### Guidelines for producing the self-evaluation document for Review of College Higher Education

The usefulness of the self-evaluation document (SED) to the review team will be one of the main factors that we will take into account when we decide the length of your review. The better targeted to the areas of the review, the more carefully chosen the evidence, and the more reflective the document is, the greater the likelihood that the team will be able to verify your college's approaches and gather evidence of its own quickly and effectively.

The purpose of the SED is to provide the review team with an account of how you know that your college meets the expectations set out in the judgement scheme. The most useful format in which you can set out the information is, therefore, under the four judgement headings. You might also wish to bear in mind the broad expectations for each judgement in terms of organising your material. In making your decision about the evidence you select, you could take account of factors which the review teams will use as guidance in reaching their judgement. These can all be found in Annex 2.

The quality of the learning opportunities which students experience in a college and the standard of the awards that they take away are central to the review process. It will be difficult for a review team to work effectively with a SED that does not start from an awareness of this centrality.

It is important that each section of the SED can be clearly identified and that it has a comprehensive index giving references to the evidence that the college wishes to cite. It is not the responsibility of the review team to seek out evidence to support the college's views.

**The SED should indicate how the college's policies, processes and structures relate to all levels of its HE provision.**

### Suggested structure of the self-evaluation document for Review of College Higher Education

#### A Core element of the review

##### Section 1: Brief description of the college (four pages)

- Mission
- Major changes since last review
- Key challenges the college faces
- Implications of changes and challenges for safeguarding academic standards and the quality of students' learning opportunities
- Details of the college's responsibilities for the management of the quality assurance of its higher education provision

The final bullet point is particularly important. Given that Review of College Higher Education (RCHE) is concerned with the way in which colleges discharge their responsibilities, it is difficult to overstate the importance of giving the review team a clear understanding of what these responsibilities are. This description should be underpinned by the provision of the agreements with awarding bodies, which should reflect the Expectations in *Chapter B10: Management of collaborative arrangements* of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education

(the Quality Code) regarding the existence of agreements setting out the rights and obligations of both parties. See Annex 4 for more information about the provision of supporting information.

### **Section 2: How the college has addressed the recommendations of its last audits/review(s) (two pages)**

Briefly describe how the recommendations from the last review(s) have been acted upon, and how good practice identified has been capitalised on. Refer to any action plans which have been produced as a result of review(s).

### **Section 3: The college's management of its responsibilities for academic standards**

The following expectations apply in this area, depending upon your agreement with your awarding body/ies. You should comment on each of the following as appropriate to your agreement.

- 1 Each qualification (including those awarded under collaborative arrangements) is allocated to the appropriate level of *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ).
- 2 Use of external examiners is scrupulous.
- 3 Design, approval, monitoring and review of assessment strategies is effective in ensuring that students have the opportunity to demonstrate the learning outcomes of the award.
- 4 Design, approval, monitoring and review of programmes enables standards to be set and maintained and allows students to demonstrate the learning outcomes of the award.
- 5 Subject benchmark statements are used effectively in programme design, approval, delivery and review to inform standards of awards.

In the SED you should list the **evidence that your college uses to assure itself** that these expectations are being met and that you are managing the area effectively. The review team will need access to the evidence, as explained in Annex 4a.

More information about what it might be relevant to consider as you present your evidence is given in the factors listed in Annex 2.

### **Section 4: The quality of students' learning opportunities (teaching and academic support)**

The following expectations apply in this area.

- 1 Professional standards for teaching and support of learning are supported.
- 2 Learning resources are appropriate to allow students to achieve the learning outcomes of their programmes.
- 3 Students contribute effectively to quality assurance.
- 4 There is effective use of management information to safeguard quality and standards and to promote enhancement of student learning opportunities.
- 5 Policies and procedures used to admit students are clear, fair, explicit and consistently applied.
- 6 There are effective complaints and appeals procedures.
- 7 There is an approach to career education, information, advice and guidance that is adequately quality assured.
- 8 The quality of learning opportunities is managed to enable the entitlements of disabled students to be met.

- 9 The quality of learning opportunities for international students is appropriate.
- 10 The quality of learning opportunities delivered as part of collaborative arrangements is managed effectively to enable students to achieve their awards.
- 11 The quality of learning opportunities delivered through flexible and distributed arrangements, including e-learning, is managed effectively.
- 12 The quality of learning opportunities delivered through work-based and placement learning is effective.
- 13 A document setting out the mutual expectations of the college and its students, which may take the form of a student charter or equivalent document, is available.

In the SED you should list the **evidence that your college uses to assure itself** that these expectations are being met and that you are managing the area effectively. The review team will need access to the evidence, as explained in Annex 4a.

More information about what it might be relevant to consider as you present your evidence is given in the factors listed in Annex 2.

### **Section 5: The quality of information about the learning opportunities offered, including that produced for prospective and current students**

The following expectation applies in this area.

- 1 Higher education providers produce information for their intended audiences about the higher education they offer that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

In the SED you should list the **evidence that your college uses to assure itself** that the expectation is being met and that you are managing the area effectively. The review team will need access to the evidence, as explained in Annex 4a.

More information about what it might be relevant to consider as you present your evidence is given in the factors listed in Annex 2.

### **Section 6: The college's enhancement of students' learning opportunities**

The following expectation applies in this area.

- 1 Deliberate steps are being taken at college level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities.

In the SED you should list the **evidence that your college uses to assure itself** that this expectation is being met and that you are managing the area effectively. The review team will need access to the evidence, as explained in Annex 4a.

More information about what it might be relevant to consider as you present your evidence is given in the factors listed in Annex 2.

When writing Sections 3 to 6 you do not need to write a narrative to link the information. However, you can provide very brief notes or bullet points to contextualise it if you think that it will not make sense to the review team. We do not expect you to spell out how you have evaluated your college's approach to safeguarding quality and standards. That will be implicit in the choice of convincing and robust evidence. The review team will decide whether the approach is effective or not as part of its judgement.

**B Thematic element of review**

This part of the SED should address the theme topic, together with an evaluation of the college's effectiveness of its management in the theme area. QAA provides more information on its website about how you might go about covering the theme topic.

## Annex 4

### Provision of documentation for Review of College Higher Education

The review team will require access to the following **three sets** of information to prepare itself **before the first team visit**. All of the information specified should be currently available in the college and does not have to be prepared specially for the review. It should all be made available electronically. Where the information is available online, the precise URL of where it can be found will be enough, but the college must be able to give assurances that online documentation will not change during review activity (from document upload to receipt of draft report).

The three sets of information are as follows.

- 1 Information about the learning opportunities offered, including the required Key and Wider Information Sets.
- 2 Any documents that are cross-referenced to the SED.
- 3 Standard documentation, as set out below, which may already be included in documents cross-references to the SED.

#### 1 Required Key and Wider Information Sets

This information is specified in HEFCE 2011/18, Table 1 and Table 2, and on the Unistats (or its successor for the KIS) and UCAS websites.

#### 2 SED cross-referenced material

The college should cross-reference relevant documentation to the SED. The referenced material should constitute the evidence that the college itself would use in its own ongoing evaluation of its effectiveness in the areas of the SED. The referenced material should not be produced specifically for the review.

#### 3 Standard documentation

The college should provide the following information, **if it is not already covered in the two sets of information mentioned above**.

- Agreements with awarding body/ies.
- College's mission, strategic plan and higher education strategy.
- Learning and teaching strategy (or equivalent document) and updates on the progress of the strategy since the last audit/review.
- College policy, procedures and guidance on quality assurance and enhancement (including assessment).
- A diagram of the structure of the main bodies (deliberative and management) which are responsible for the management of quality and standards. This should indicate both central and local (that is, school/faculty or similar) bodies.
- Minutes and papers of central quality assurance bodies for the two academic years previous to the review.
- Annual reports where these have a bearing on the management of quality and standards for the two years previous to the review.
- A description of the college's plans to enhance the quality of students' learning opportunities, if these are not included in the learning and teaching strategy or similar.



- A list of programmes which are accredited by a PSRB, the PSRB in question, date of last visit, and accreditation status.

The review team will need additional documentation **at the first team visit or the review visit**. The nature of this will depend to some extent on the team's explorations and what the college has already provided as evidence, but it is expected that a sample of the following will always be required:

- external examiners' reports and responses
- programme specifications
- programme approval (validation) reports, annual monitoring reports and periodic review reports, and follow-up documentation.

In addition, there may be situations where review teams may ask to see a sample of:

- student assessment
- student evaluation forms.

## Annex 5

### The role of the college facilitator

The college is invited to appoint a college facilitator (CF) to support the review. The role of the CF is intended to improve the flow of information between the team and the college. It is envisaged that the CF will be a member of the college's staff.

The role of the CF is to:

- act as the primary contact for the QAA officer during the preparations for the review, including the preparatory meeting
- act as the primary contact for the review team during the first team visit and the review visit
- provide advice and guidance to the team on the SED and any supporting documentation at the first team visit, and, thereafter, further sources of information
- provide advice and guidance to the team on college structures, policies, priorities and procedures
- keep an updated list of evidence to be presented to the review team throughout the review, to be confirmed by the QAA officer
- ensure that the college has a good understanding of the matters raised by the review team at the first team visit, thus contributing to the effectiveness of the review, and to the subsequent enhancement of quality and standards within the college
- meet the review team at the team's request during the review, in order to provide further guidance on sources of information and clarification of matters relating to college structures, policies, priorities and procedures
- work with the lead student representative (LSR) to ensure that the student representative body is informed of, and understands, the progress of the review team.

At the first team visit or review visit the CF will not be present for the review team's private meetings. However, the CF will have the opportunity for regular meetings which will provide opportunities for both the team and the college to seek further clarification outside of the formal meetings. This development is intended to improve communications between the college and the team during the review and enable colleges to gain a better understanding of the team's lines of enquiry during the review. We suggest (and make financial provision for) the CF and LSR joining the review team at lunch on the first day of the visit.

The CF should develop a relationship with the LSR that is appropriate to the college and to the organisation of the student body. It is anticipated that the LSR will be involved in the oversight and possibly the preparation of the student submission, and with selecting students to meet the review team.

In some colleges it may be appropriate for the CF to support the LSR to help ensure that the student representative body is fully aware of the review process, its purpose and the students' role within it. Where appropriate and in agreement with the LSR, the CF might also provide guidance and support to students' representatives when preparing the student submission and meetings with the review team.

## Appointment and briefing

The person appointed as CF must possess:

- a good working knowledge of the college's systems and procedures, and an appreciation of quality and standards matters
- knowledge and understanding of the Review of College Higher Education process
- the ability to communicate clearly, build relationships and maintain confidentiality
- the ability to provide objective guidance and advice to the review team.

The person appointed by the college is expected to act as the facilitator for both the first team visit and review visit. After the first team visit has taken place the college should change its appointed CF only in exceptional circumstances, and only with the agreement of QAA.

QAA will provide a briefing for CFs to ensure that they understand the role and how the review process operates.

## Protocols

Throughout the review, the role of the CF is to help the review team come to a clear and accurate understanding of the structures, policies, priorities and procedures of the college. The role requires the CF to observe objectively, to communicate clearly with the team where requested, and to establish effective relationships with the QAA officer and the LSR. The CF should not act as an advocate for the college. However, the CF may legitimately:

- bring additional information to the attention of the team
- seek to correct factual inaccuracy
- provide advice on college matters
- assist the college in understanding matters raised by the team.

It is for the review team to decide how best to use the information provided by the CF. The CF is not a member of the team and will not make judgements about the provision.

The CF is required to observe the same conventions of confidentiality as members of the review team. In particular, the confidentiality of written material produced by team members must be respected, and no information gained may be used in a manner that allows individuals to be identified. However, providing appropriate confidentiality is observed, the CF may make notes on discussions with the team and report back to other staff, in order to ensure that the college has a good understanding of the matters raised by the team at this stage in the process. This can contribute to the effectiveness of the review, and to the subsequent enhancement of quality and standards within the college.

The CF does not have access to QAA's electronic communication system for review teams.

The review team has the right to ask the CF to disengage from the review process at any time, if it considers that there are conflicts of interest, or that the CF's presence will inhibit discussions.

## Annex 6

### Student engagement with Review of College Higher Education

Students are central both to the purpose of Review of College Higher Education (RCHE) and to the process of review. Every review will present opportunities for students to inform and contribute to the review team's activities.

Student representatives and students from the college, along with the lead student representative (LSR), will be invited to participate in the preparatory meeting between QAA and the college, and will have access to the online briefing package. It will often be the case that student officers will change during the period of the review. Where this is the case, QAA requests that an appropriate handover of information takes place and that the college facilitator (CF) maintains contact with the representatives and ensures that the representatives of the student body are aware of the name and contact details of the QAA officer responsible for the review.

Students' representatives and students from the college will be invited to take part in meetings during the review team's visit to the college. These meetings provide a means through which students can make sure that the team is aware of matters of primary interest or concern to them.

#### The lead student representative

The lead student representative (LSR) is a new role in QAA's review method. It is designed to allow student representatives to play a more central part in the organisation of the review. We would like the LSR to encourage students to become engaged with the review process and keep them informed of its progress. We also envisage that the LSR will oversee the production of the student submission (SS). If possible we would like to work with the LSR to select the students whom the review team will meet. We know that it might not be possible to designate the LSR for a particular review very early in the process.

It is up to the student representative body to decide who should take on the role of the LSR. We recognise that this might be a challenge in itself, but suggest that the LSR might be an officer from the students' union, an appropriate member of a similar representative student body, a student drawn from the college's established procedures for course representation, the Education Officer, or equivalent.

We know that not all colleges are resourced to be able to provide the level of engagement envisaged for the LSR so we will be flexible about the amount of time that the LSR should provide. It would be quite acceptable if the LSR represented a job-share or team effort, as long as it was clear who QAA should communicate with.

QAA envisages that normally the LSR will:

- receive copies of key correspondence from QAA
- help the review team to select students to meet
- be present for the first team visit and review visit
- attend the final meeting in the college
- liaise internally with the CF to ensure smooth communication between the student body and the college during the process
- disseminate information about the review to the student body

- organise or oversee the writing of the SS, and ensure continuity of activity over the review process.

## Student submission

The student submission (SS) provides a means by which students, through their representatives, can inform the review team ahead of the review visit of matters they consider important and relevant to the purpose of RCHE. It is an opportunity for the representatives to give the review team an impression of what it is like to be a student at that college and how their views are considered in the college's decision-making and quality assurance processes.

### Format, length and content

The student submission may take a variety of forms, for example video, interviews, focus group presentations, podcast, or a written SS. The submission should be concise and should provide an explanation of the sources of evidence that informed its comments and conclusions.

The SS must include a statement of how it has been compiled, its authorship, and the extent to which its contents have been shared with and endorsed by other college students as a whole.

The review team will welcome an SS that tries to represent the views of as wide a student constituency as possible. You are encouraged to make use of existing information, such as National Student Survey data, results from internal student surveys and recorded outcomes of meetings with staff and students, rather than conducting surveys especially for the SS.

When gathering evidence for and structuring the SS it will be helpful if you take account of the advice given to colleges for constructing the SED (see Annex 3). The SED addresses both parts of the review: the core part and the thematic part, and it would be useful if the SS did the same.

As far as the core part of the review is concerned, you might particularly wish to focus on students' views on:

- whether the college fulfils its responsibility for monitoring the threshold academic standards set by its awarding bodies
- how effectively the college manages the quality of students' learning opportunities
- how effectively the college manages the quality of the information it provides about the higher education it offers, including that produced for prospective and current students
- the college's plans to enhance the quality of students' learning opportunities.

The thematic part of the review is based on a specific topic outlined in paragraph 17 of this handbook. It will be helpful to the review team if the SS includes information about the theme topic, especially whether students think that the college is managing this area of its provision effectively, and how students are engaged in managing its quality.

The SS should **not** name, or discuss the competence of, individual members of staff. It should not discuss personal grievances. It should also seek to avoid including comments from individual students who may not be well placed to speak as a representative of a wider group.

If the students and the college wish to present a joint SED, this is acceptable so long as it is made clear in the document that the SED is a genuine reflection of student views and the process by which students were involved.

More information and guidance about producing the SS will be published on QAA's website.

### **Submission delivery date**

The SS should be posted to the QAA secure electronic folder at the same time as the College uploads its own SED. The date will be confirmed by the QAA officer at the preparatory meeting held 16 weeks before the review visit.

### **Confidentiality**

QAA expects the student body to share its SS with the college, and the college to share its SED with the student body. This openness is desirable because it enables the review team to discuss both documents freely with the college and students during the review and to check the accuracy of their contents, and it encourages an open and transparent approach to the review. The student body may, if it wishes, request that its SS is not shared with the college and is kept confidential to QAA and the team. If the contents of the SS are not to be shared with the college, this must be stated clearly on the front of the document. QAA will respect this wish, but students are asked to bear in mind that the team's use of a confidential submission will inevitably be restricted by the fact that its contents are unknown to the college's staff.

### **Other ways for students to make their views known**

QAA is committed to enabling as many students as possible to participate in RCHE. QAA will provide a way for those students who, for whatever reason, are not involved in the preparation of the SS or in meeting the review team to be able to share their comments directly with the review team. This will probably be in the form of an online folder. Further information about this facility will be published in due course.

### **Continuity**

RCHE extends over a period of some six months. It is likely that both the college and its students will have been preparing well before the start of the review, and will continue to be involved in action planning afterwards. QAA expects colleges to ensure that students are fully informed and involved in the process throughout. We expect that the student representative body and the college will wish to develop a means for regularly exchanging information about quality assurance and enhancement, not only so that students' representatives are kept informed about the review process but also to support general engagement with the quality management processes of the college.

Once the review is over, QAA expects that the draft report and evidence base is shared with student representatives and that they are given an opportunity to comment on matters of accuracy.

The college is required to produce an action plan to respond to the review's findings. It is expected that the student representative body will have input in the drawing up of that action plan, and in its annual update. There will also be an opportunity for students to contribute to the follow-up of the action plan that QAA will carry out three years after the review.

## **Annex 7**

### **A possible agenda for the preparatory meeting**

**Review of College Higher Education: [name of college]**

**Preparatory meeting: at [time] on [date]**

To be attended by staff and student representatives, to include the college facilitator and the lead student representative.

For all items it would be helpful if you are able to let the QAA officer know in advance if there are particular matters that you would like to discuss.

### **Agenda**

#### **Introductions**

##### **Brief outline of the process by the QAA officer**

Please refer to the *Review of College Higher Education: A handbook for colleges, July 2012* and the online briefing on QAA's website.<sup>6</sup>

This item will normally cover:

- the significant features of the process
- the role of the college facilitator
- the role of the lead student representative
- information about the learning opportunities offered, including the Key Information Set and the Wider Information Set
- other documentation required (detail could be given under item 5)
- use of reference points
- timetable and key dates.

##### **Scope of the Review of College Higher Education**

Discussion of the provision to be included in the review.

##### **Student involvement in the process**

- Resources which students might find useful
- The scope and purpose of the student submission
- Process for the selection of students to meet the review team
- Support available from QAA

##### **Role of awarding bodies**

##### **Preparation of the self-evaluation document (SED) and supporting documentation**

- The format and structure of the SED
- Reference to documentary evidence

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<sup>6</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/Pages/onlinebriefing.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/Pages/onlinebriefing.aspx)

### **Thematic element**

Discussion of the thematic element to be explored and how consideration of and reporting on the theme relates to overall review enquiries.

### **The findings of the Review of College Higher Education**

- The judgements
- Recommendations
- Features of good practice
- Affirmations

### **Operational aspects of the review**

- The first team visit: structure and conduct
- Review visit: structure and conduct
- Information provision - uploading of documents
- Practical arrangements: rooms; photocopying; computer access; hotels

### **Structure of the review report**

- The report and summary
- The evidence base
- Publication

### **Action planning and sign-off**

### **Any other questions**

Name

QAA officer, Group

Date



**QAA 480 07/12**

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