

## Annex D Quality of Learning and Teaching

D.1 From the early 1990s until 1997, the quality of teaching provision in institutions of higher education was subject to two, separately organised, forms of external review:

- quality audit – a review of the systems and procedures used by institutions to monitor and assure academic quality and standards. This was conducted by the Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC) which was created by the then CVCP
- quality assessment – assessment of the quality of education provided by institutions in individual subject areas. This form of assessment was organised on separate bases for England and Wales by the HEFCE and HEFCW, each of which has a statutory duty to ensure that arrangements are made to assess the quality of education in institutions to which it provides funding. In Northern Ireland, the assessment was organised on behalf of DENI by the HEFCE.

D.2 Both quality audit and quality assessment involved visits to institutions by teams of assessors. These arrangements stemmed from the 1991 White Paper, *Higher Education: A New Framework*, which made a distinction between the two aspects of quality assurance.

D.3 It became evident that this system involved an element of duplication and imposed considerable administrative demands on institutions. Accordingly, following review in 1996 by a Joint Planning Group, it was agreed to replace the above arrangements by establishing a single Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) to operate on a UK-wide basis. It was felt that the new agency would be best placed to integrate the separate but complementary processes of quality assessment and quality audit; and to carry out those functions in a cost-effective way. It could also promote the development and evolution of those processes to reflect the growing maturity and effectiveness of institutions' own quality assurance processes, and thus to reduce the weight of external scrutiny on institutions while continuing to meet the needs of all the stakeholders in higher education. The QAA came into being in April 1997 and is funded primarily through service level agreements with the Funding Councils and subscriptions from higher education institutions.

D.4 The report of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (Dearing Report) caused the QAA to embark on a fundamental review of quality assurance methods across the UK. This has resulted in the design of a new framework which places emphasis on the assurance of academic standards as well as quality. As part of the design of the new framework, the QAA has undertaken work to develop subject benchmark information, programme specifications, codes of practice and qualifications frameworks. The development of the higher education qualifications frameworks will be completed in early 2001. All the currently planned sections of the code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education are planned to be published by the end of 2001. Subject benchmark statements were published in 22 subjects in 2000 and a further 23 statements will be published in 2001. Programme specifications form an integral part of the academic review process.

D.5 The QAA will complete the inherited programme of subject reviews in England and Northern Ireland by December 2001 (which will complete the HEFCE/DHFETE 1993-2001

programme of quality assessments). The new integrated process of academic review was introduced in Scotland in October 2000 and is being introduced in England from January 2002.

### **Quality Assurance by Other Bodies**

D.6 In England the quality of provision of Initial Teacher Training is assessed by inspectors from the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED). In Wales this function is undertaken by the Office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspectors of Schools in Wales (OHMCI).

D.7 Certain types of course, such as Engineering, have accreditation arrangements with professional bodies, and institutions may therefore also receive accreditation visits from these bodies from time to time.