

Overview

Quality Assurance System
in Higher Education

United Kingdom

Second edition (2015)

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Introduction

In addition to its core activities of university evaluation, awarding of degrees and research activities, the National Institution for Academic Degrees and University Evaluation (NIAD-UE) is working closely with overseas quality assurance organizations, particularly those having advanced higher education systems and close ties with Japan, to gain the trust of the international community in Japanese higher education and promote international collaboration among higher education institutions (HEIs).

As each country possesses different political, societal, cultural and language element, the structure of its quality assurance system for higher education also differs. In building relationships and realizing effective cooperation that transcend these barriers, ‘mutual understanding’ must first be enhanced among cooperating organizations by exchanging accurate information on their respective quality assurance systems and the higher education systems that underlie them. Amidst growing globalization of higher education and increase of educational collaboration in the international dimension, it has also become important for HEIs to share information on their activities of quality assurance with their partners in order to provide an effective and quality-assured collaborative program.

In this context, International Affairs Division of NIAD-UE has developed the ‘Information Package’ as a means for publishing basic information on higher education and its quality assurance system in Japan as well as some other countries. We have produced these of Japan, US, UK, Australia, Netherlands, France, Korea, China, and Germany.

The UK’s history when it has embarked on the quality assurance system for higher education goes back to the 1990s. UK’s high quality education earning a worldwide reputation is achieved through a national quality assurance system such as review activities by the higher education institutions themselves and accreditation by external quality assurance agencies. The scale, shape, structure and purpose of learning provision are changing in the UK and further development has been made in the area of quality assurance system. Based on these recent trend of the UK, NIAD-UE has produced an **“Overview of the Quality Assurance System in Higher Education: United Kingdom (second edition)”** in both English and Japanese. We hope that these information would help for development of higher education cooperation between UK and Japan.

This ‘Overview’ document is produced based on public information concerning UK higher education system and quality assurance system in UK. We have also collected updated information by visiting the organizations which responsible for the higher education policy, quality assurance (accreditation) agencies. We would like to thank the people who gave us useful comments and suggestions to produce the document. We would also like to express our special thanks to Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), for their contributions to the production of this document.

This ‘Overview’ document is also available from our website:

http://www.niad.ac.jp/english/unive/publications/information_package.htm

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National Institution for Academic Degrees and University Evaluation

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Map



Source: <http://www.freemap.jp/itemDownload/europe/uk2/4.gif>

I. Basic information on the country

Name of country	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland		
Capital	London		
Major language	English		
Population*	63,2 million (2011)		
Nominal GDP**	2,418,000 million USD (2011)		
Nominal GDP per capita**	39,592 USD (2011)		
Public spending on education as a percentage of the total government spending***	All levels of education (OECD average 12.9%)	12.2%	HE level (OECD average 3.2%) (2011)
Public spending on education as a percentage of GDP***	All levels of education (OECD average 5.6%)	6.0%	HE level (OECD average 1.4%) (2011)
Spending per student at higher education level***	14,223 USD (2011)		
Public spending on higher education per student***	3,049 USD (2011)		
Progression rate into higher education****	English domiciled students, aged 17-30 2011/12 - 49.3%		
Organisation of education system	See II-2. Organisation of the education system, page 9.		
Cycle of academic year*****	<p>The full academic year for higher education runs from 1 August to 31 July. Organisation of the teaching year is at the discretion of the individual institution. Although the organisation of teaching traditionally reflected this three-term system, institutions are increasingly organizing their teaching along the two-semester system.</p> <p>Several universities have introduced courses that run twice a year, with two different start dates: in autumn (as normal) and also in spring.</p>		

Source:

* Office for National Statistics (ONS) website - 2011 UK censuses:

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/census/2011/uk-census/>

** The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan website - Overview of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland: <http://www.mofa.go.jp>

*** OECD (2014) *Education at a Glance 2014*.

**** Universities UK (UUK) (2013) *Higher Education in Facts and Figures, summer 2013*.

***** European Commission *Eurydice - Facts and Figures: The Organisation of the Academic Year in Europe 2013/14*.

II. The higher education system

1. History of UK higher education

1) Historical overview

The first universities evolved

The first universities, those of Oxford and Cambridge, evolved as private bodies during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Although other bodies, such as the Inns of Court (law) and Royal Colleges of Medicine and Surgery, became increasingly important as providers of professional training and regulation of competence, it was not until the nineteenth and early twentieth century that the major civic universities were founded in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. These remained private foundations, albeit with occasional government financial aid.

In the first half of the twentieth century, a number of university colleges developed, catering mainly to local students taking University of London external degrees. These subsequently became universities in their own right.

University education in Scotland also has a long history. Four universities - St Andrews, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Edinburgh, known collectively as the four ancient Scottish universities, - were founded in the 15th and 16th centuries. Four further universities were formally established as independent universities between 1964 and 1967.

Expansion in higher education - the latter half of 20th century

The Barlow Report (1946) recommended a doubling of university student numbers, especially in science subjects, to meet the need for scientific manpower. Both government subsidy for universities and student numbers greatly increased in the immediate postwar period.

The Robbins Report of 1963, published by the Committee on Higher Education, recommended substantial expansion in higher education. It expressed the view that 'courses of higher education should be available to all those who are qualified by ability and attainment to pursue them and who wish to do so'. The principles and recommendations of the Robbins Report formed the basis for the development of the university sector for subsequent years. Then, a number of 'new universities' were founded in the 1960s. (Note: In more recent years, the term 'new universities' has come to denote institutions which gained university title since 1992.)

Many institutions had been originally set up by charitable endowment to enable working-class men and women to advance their general knowledge and industrial skills on a part- or full-time basis. Such institutions, known as polytechnics, were later maintained and regulated by local authorities.

Other higher education institutions were originally established as colleges for training teachers. A significant number of these were provided by churches. They were subsequently maintained and regulated by local authorities.

The Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) was established in 1964 for the validation of programmes at higher education institutions, such as polytechnics and higher education colleges, which did not have their own degree-awarding powers.

1986 - RAE initiated

The first Research Assessment Exercise was carried out in 1986 to provide ratings of the quality of research conducted in universities and higher education colleges in the UK. The ratings are used to inform allocation of funds by the higher education funding bodies. Further RAEs were carried out in 1989, 1992, 1996, 2001, and 2008.

The Education Reform Act 1988

Under the Education Reform Act 1988, polytechnics and higher education colleges in England and Wales were no longer under local authority control, and became autonomous institutions. The Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council (PCFC) and the Universities Funding Council (UFC) were created. The PCFC funded over 50 polytechnics and colleges previously funded by local education authorities. The UFC funded all 52 universities in the UK.

The Further and Higher Education Act 1992 and the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992

The Act dissolved PCFC and UFC, and created new bodies to fund all higher education institutions in their respective areas of the UK: Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE); Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW); and Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (SHEFC). Since April 1993, these bodies have funded all higher education institutions in the UK.

In England and Wales there remained a 'binary divide' between the university sector and the public/polytechnic sector. However, as universities began to offer vocational courses and work alongside business and their local communities, and non-university institutions undertook scholarship and research, the distinction between them became increasingly blurred. Consequently, the Act abolished the division between universities and polytechnics, ending the binary divide in higher education.

It dissolved CNAA and enabled the former polytechnics to gain degree-awarding powers and to use the word 'university' in their title. Other higher education institutions were able to apply to the Privy Council for taught degree-awarding powers, research degree-awarding powers and university title.

1997 - QAA established

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) was established to provide an integrated quality assurance service for UK higher education. It is an independent body funded by subscriptions from universities and colleges of higher education, and through contracts with the main higher education funding councils.

1997 - The Dearing Report

During the early 1990s, despite a rapid expansion of the higher education sector, public funding for institutions fell by around 25 per cent per student, putting considerable pressure on universities and colleges. In 1994, faced with increasing demand for higher education, the government imposed a ceiling on growth in full-time undergraduate student numbers.

Against this background, in May 1996, the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education was established to make recommendations on the purposes, shape, size and funding of higher education. The Committee, chaired by Sir Ron Dearing, first took the fundamental review of higher education since the Robbins Report of 1963, and reported in 1997. Key themes and recommendations included:

- A new 'compact' for higher education between the state, individuals and their families, graduates and institutions in which each should contribute to, and receive benefits from, higher education.
- An increase and widening of participation, mainly through two-year courses of higher education provided in colleges of further education.
- Implementation of measures to improve standards in teaching and to ensure the comparability of qualifications.
- Greater emphasis on the regional role of universities and colleges.
- The ability of universities and colleges to govern and manage themselves to obtain maximum efficiency and effectiveness.
- Support of excellence in research.

The Committee also made a number of recommendations concerning the funding of higher education, including a proposal that full-time students in higher education should pay some of the costs of their tuition fees.

The Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998

In response to the Dearing Report, annual tuition fees of £1,000 were introduced for degree courses for the first time ever, as a result of the 1998 Teaching and Higher Education Act. Fees were means-tested on the basis of parental income.

1998 - Devolution of powers to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

In Scotland, the establishment of the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish government is provided for in the Scotland Act 1998. The Scottish government is responsible for functions of government within Scotland including education. The Scottish Parliament has full legislative powers over devolved matters and it approved that tuition fees for all Scottish students was abolished in 2000.

The Government of Wales Act 1998 provided for the establishment of the National Assembly for Wales, and the Northern Ireland Assembly was constituted under the Northern Ireland Act 1998. These assemblies also have legislative powers on a range of issues including education.

2003 - White Paper - The Future of Higher Education

In October 2001, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) announced a wide-ranging and fundamental review to help the higher education sector improve and expand. This announcement was followed up in January 2003, by the White Paper, 'The Future of Higher Education', which set out the government's strategy for the reform of higher education in England, as well as a number of measures which would affect the rest of the UK. The strategy focused on packages of measures in six key areas:

- Strengthening research through increased spending
- Improving links between higher education and business
- Promoting excellence in teaching in higher education through the creation of new professional standards and a new national body
- Continuing to expand higher education to increase participation towards 50 per cent
- Ensuring fair access to higher education for young people from lower-income families
- Reforming funding through the introduction of a new graduate contribution scheme

Following the White Paper of 2003, which proposed the creation of a Teaching Quality Academy, the Higher Education Academy (HEA) was set up in 2004 to work with the UK higher education community to enhance the student experience. The HEA has worked with institutions and professional bodies to develop national professional standards in higher education teaching.

The Higher Education Act 2004 and the Higher Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2005

The Higher Education Act 2004 applied to mainly England and Wales and the Higher Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2005 applied to Northern Ireland legislated for White Paper's proposals. The part of student fees and fair access of these acts did not apply to Scotland.

The Act allowed higher education institutions in England to charge variable tuition fees of up to £3,000 per year from the academic year 2006/07, rising only with inflation until an independent review is undertaken in 2009. The Act also introduced new arrangements for student support, allowing students to take out a tuition fee loan for the full amount of their fees, and providing a means-tested maintenance grant.

One of the Government's main aims for higher education is to raise and widen participation. The Act established the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) in England. OFFA is an independent body, separate from, but supported by, HEFCE. The main role of OFFA is to promote and safeguard fair access to higher education for under-represented groups, in the light of the introduction of variable tuition fees in 2006-07. Any institution that intends to charge above the basic fee (£1,200 in 2006) needs an 'Access Agreement' approved by the Director of OFFA.

In Wales and Northern Ireland, the decision on whether to raise tuition fees is under the control of the each Assembly. Tuition fees in Wales rose from the academic year 2006/07 only for students coming from elsewhere in the UK, though Welsh and non UK EU students did not be affected. In Northern Ireland, tuition fees did not change. In addition, there are similar arrangements rather than by the OFFA as in England, only HEIs who have had their fee plan approved by the Higher

Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) or the Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland will be able to charge above the basic rate.

Since then, the setting and the range of application of tuition fees have varied depending on the administrative part of the UK (See II-8. Tuition fees, page 26).

The Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005

In Scotland, the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005 of the Scottish Parliament was established. This Act is to make provision establishing the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council (SFC), which is commonly known as 'the Scottish Funding Council,' and provision as to its functions; to make provision as to support for further and higher education; to make provision relating to bodies which provide further and higher education; and for connected purposes. SFC replaced the former Scottish Further Education Funding Council (SFEFC) and the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (SHEFC) and brought together funding and support for Scotland's colleges and universities under one body.

2007 - DIUS created ¹

A new government department with responsibility for higher education, the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS), was created in June 2007 with the mission to invest in science and research, skills and innovation to secure the future prosperity of the UK. DIUS bring together responsibilities for higher education in England, previously held by DfES and the Department of Trade and Industry.

2009 - BIS created ²

In June 2009, the government created a new Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) in England, whose role is to build Britain's capabilities to compete in the global economy. The new Department was created by merging the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR) and DIUS to form a single department committed to building Britain's future economic strength.

BIS is the institutional realization of the approach to promoting British competitiveness and productivity as set out in the White Paper 'Building Britain's Future: New Industry, New Jobs', produced jointly by BERR and DIUS in April 2009.

In November 2009, the Government has unveiled a new framework for the future success of higher education, setting out the important role universities will play in securing the country's economic recovery and long term prosperity. The higher education framework, Higher Ambitions, sets out a strategy for universities to remain world class, providing the nation with the high level skills needed to remain competitive, while continuing to attract the brightest students and researchers. Key measures set out in the framework include:

¹ As to government departments for higher education for other than England, please see II-6. Responsible authorities and higher education related bodies, page 23.

² Same as above.

- More competition between universities, giving greater priority to programmes that meet the need for high level skills;
- Business to be more engaged in the funding and design of programmes, sponsorship of students, and work placements;
- Creating more part-time, work-based and foundation degrees to make it easier for adults to go to university, with routes from apprenticeships through to Foundation Degrees and other vocational programmes;
- Encouraging universities to consider contextual data in admissions, as one way of ensuring that higher education is available to all young people who have the ability to benefit;
- Universities setting out clearly what students can expect in terms of the nature and quality of courses offered;
- Sustaining our world class research base by continuing to focus on excellence, concentrating research funding where needed to secure critical mass and impact; and
- Encouraging collaboration between universities on world class research, especially in high cost science.

2) Recent developments: 2010 to the present

2010 - The Browne Review

The Browne Review is an independent review on the student financial support system and higher education funding in the UK. The review is known as "Browne Review" taking the name of the chair, Lord Browne of Madingley. The review made recommendations to government on the higher education system in the UK around the fees policy and financial support for full and part-time undergraduate and postgraduate students. The result of the review was reported in 2010, as the Browne Report (original title: Securing a sustainable future for higher education).

The six guiding principles of the review were:

- There should be more investment in Higher Education - but institutions will have to convince students of the benefits of investing more.
- Student choice should be increased.
- Everyone who has the potential should be able to benefit from higher education.
- No student should have to pay towards the costs of learning until they are working.
After leaving university, graduates will only begin repaying when they reach annual earnings of over £21,000 a year.
- When payments are made they should be affordable.
- Part time students should be treated the same as full time students for the costs of learning.

2011 - Higher Education White Paper - Students at the Heart of the System

BIS published a Higher Education White Paper - Students at the Heart of the System on 28 June 2011. This White Paper sets out England's policies for the reform of higher education.

The proposals contained in 'Students at the Heart of the System' cover four broad areas: reforming

funding; delivering a better student experience; enabling universities to increase social mobility; and reducing regulation and removing barriers for new providers. These reforms will ensure that universities are held accountable for an improved student experience. The overall goal is a sector that is freed to respond in new ways to the needs of students. These plans for reforming higher education have been influenced by the recommendations of Lord Browne's Independent Review.

The HE White Paper set out Government plans to:

- Ensure better information for students before they apply, better teaching while at university, greater transparency in areas such as feedback on their work and better preparation for the job market.
- Undertake a review into how university-industry collaboration can excel
- Encourage universities to engage actively with employers to accredit university programmes.
- Make universities more accountable to students on teaching quality, who can trigger quality reviews where there are grounds for concern.
- Review the extent to which Student Charters are adopted and whether they should be made mandatory in the future.
- Free up student number controls by making around 85,000 places contestable among universities in 2012/13: through unrestrained recruitment of high-achieving students who typically get AAB grades, and by creating a flexible margin of places to reward quality providers charging an average of £7,500 or less for tuition.
- Ensure that the Office for Fair Access is properly resourced so that it can go further and faster to drive fair access for students from lower income families and widen participation.
- Enable a wider range of providers to join the sector to offer more choice for students.
- Promise less regulation and bureaucracy for universities.

The Post-16 Education (Scotland) Act 2013

In Scotland, the Post-16 Education (Scotland) Act 2013 legislated for making provision about the support for, and the governance of, further and higher education institutions, including provision for the regionalisation of colleges; to make provision for reviews of how further and higher education is provided; to make provision for sharing information about young people's involvement in education and training; and for connected purposes.

The Further and Higher Education (Governance and Information) (Wales) Act 2014

In Wales, the Further and Higher Education (Governance and Information) (Wales) Act 2014 legislated for making provision about the governance of institutions within the further education sector and about the supply of information in connection with the provision of support to students in further or higher education.

*Source: European Commission Eurybase - The Education System in England, Wales, Northern Ireland 2007/08:
<http://www.eurydice.org/>*

*European Commission Eurybase - The Education System in Scotland 2007/08:
<http://www.eurydice.org/>*

Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (2003) *The future of higher education*.

Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) (2005) *Higher Education in the United Kingdom*.

Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) (2009) *Departmental Report 2009*.

Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) website - *Announcements - New Department for Business, Innovation & Skills to lead fight against recession and build now for future prosperity*:
http://www.dius.gov.uk/news_and_speeches/announcements/bis

Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) (2009) *Higher Ambitions*.

Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) (2010) *The Impact of Higher Education Finance on University Participation in the UK*.

Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) (2011) *Higher Education White Paper - Students at the Heart of the System*.

Lord Browne of Madingley (2010) *Securing a sustainable future for higher education: An Independent Review of Higher Education Funding & Student Finance*.

Cabinet Office website - *Devolution of powers to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland*:
<https://www.gov.uk/devolution-of-powers-to-scotland-wales-and-northern-ireland> Higher Education

Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) (2013) *Fee Plan Guidance 2014/15*.

Scottish Funding Council (SFC) website - *About us*: <http://www.sfc.ac.uk/aboutus/aboutus.aspx>

National Archives website: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/>

2. Organisation of the educational system

1) Organisation of the educational system overview

A wide range of institutions will deliver courses at each level - from schools and colleges to further education colleges and universities. These levels - primary, secondary, 16 to 18, further education and higher education - are broadly explained below.

Higher education	'Higher education' is provided by a number of universities, higher education colleges and a small number of university colleges.
Further education	Further education colleges and many six form centres provide various courses for students of all ages.
16 to 18 education	Post-16 education provision is provided by a number of institutions - many secondary schools will provide 'tertiary education' for ages 16 to 18. Provision is also available from sixth form colleges or tertiary colleges (England and Wales only) and also further education colleges.
Secondary education	'Secondary education' is compulsory between the age of 11 and 16 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (12 and 16 in Scotland). In England, if you were born on or after 1 September 1997 you must stay in some form of education or training until your 18 th birthday. Most pupils will move from a primary school to a secondary school at age 11, although in some areas there are middle schools that cater to children from the age of 8 or 9 to 12 or 13.
Primary education	'Primary education' is compulsory between the ages of 5 and 11 in England and Wales, 4 and 11 in Northern Ireland and 5 and 12 in Scotland.

Source: The Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) website
 Eurypedia - The European Encyclopedia on National Education Systems:
http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/eurypedia_en.php

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan website - Overview of the Education System: United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland:
http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/toko/world_school/05europe/infoC51000.html

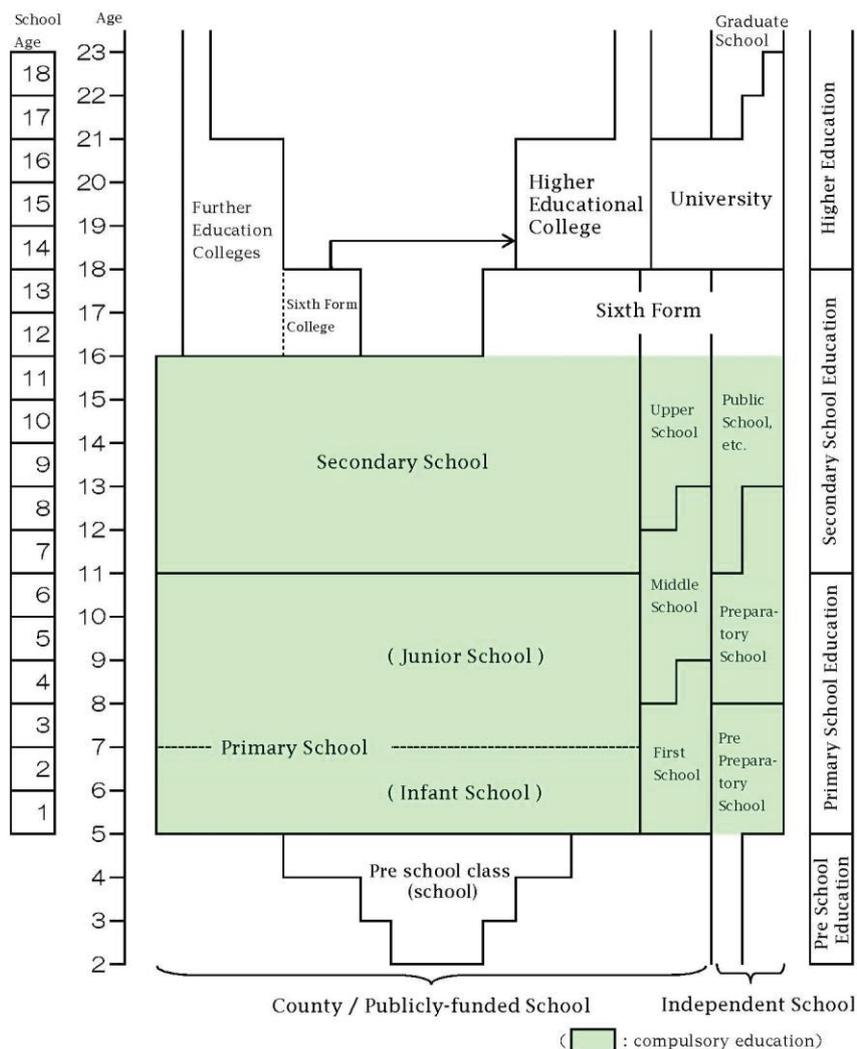
2) Diagram of UK school systems

Each administrative part of the UK established distinctive educational system whereas there are commonalities between the systems. The school system for England and Wales comprising 90% of the total population of UK is as below.

In Northern Ireland and Scotland, their school systems differ from England and Wales, that is:

- Primary school is for the ages 4 to 11 in North Ireland and 5 to 12 in Scotland.
- Secondary school is for ages 12 to 16 in Scotland.
- University is normally offered a four-year course in Scotland, however, a three-year course in other than Scotland.

Diagram of school systems (England and Wales)



Source: The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan website - *Educational statistics of foreign countries 2014*:
http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/toukei/data/syogaikoku/1352615.htm

Concerning the Diagram of education system in each administrative part of the UK, the following information in the Eurypedia will be also useful:

- England: <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/United-Kingdom-England:Overview>
- Wales: <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/United-Kingdom-Wales:Overview>
- Northern Ireland: <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/United-Kingdom-Northern-Ireland:Overview>
- Scotland: <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/United-Kingdom-Scotland:Overview>

3. Types of institution

1) Types of institution

Universities

Universities are diverse, ranging in size, mission, subject mix and history. They are self-governing and independent. In England, the older universities were established by Royal Charter or statute or Act of Parliament. The Privy Council has the power to grant university status to an institution that has necessary characteristics.

Former polytechnics were given the status of universities under the Further and Higher Education Act 1992. These are sometimes called 'new' universities, although many of them have their origins in vocational colleges that have a long history. The existing 'old' universities include many founded in the 1950s and 1960s, the 'civic' universities, founded by Royal Charter in major cities in the 19th and early 20th centuries, and the first colleges of the University of Wales, which were established in the 19th and early and mid 20th centuries.

Universities have their own degree-awarding powers. They range in size from under 4,500 students to over 32,000 students. The combined Colleges and Institutes of the University of London have over 120,000 students; and the Open University, whose part-time students study by distance learning, is even larger with over 200,000 students.

There is one privately funded university - the University of Buckingham.

Colleges

Higher education colleges also vary in size, mission, subject mix and history. Like universities, they are self-governing and independent. Some colleges were founded up to 150 years ago, and a significant number were established as church colleges. Some award their own degrees and other qualifications; in other colleges, qualifications are validated by a university or national accrediting body.

In England and Wales higher education colleges with taught degree awarding powers and over 1,000 full-time equivalent (FTE) higher education students (over 4,000 FTE higher education students in Wales) are eligible to apply for university title. In Scotland and Northern Ireland applicants must already have research degree-awarding powers and should normally have at least 4,000 FTE higher education students in total. Smaller colleges with taught degree awarding powers can apply to the Privy Council for the right to use the title of ‘university college’.

Colleges range in size from small specialist institutions, to large multi-discipline institutions. Many colleges cover a wide range of subjects, while some specialise in one or two areas, such as art and design, dance and drama, agriculture, or nursing.

Source: Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) (2005) *Higher Education in the United Kingdom*.

Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) (2009) *A guide to UK higher education*.

EACEA website - *Eurypedia*: http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/eurypedia_en.php

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) website - *Degree awarding powers - guidance and criteria*: <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/daput/guidance-and-criteria>

2) Statistics

Number of institutions (As of August 2011)

	Higher Education Institutions	Universities*
England	131	89
Scotland	19	14
Wales	11	10
Northern Ireland	4	2
UK total	165	115

* Federal institutions such as the University of Wales and the University of London are counted as one university. This list excludes foreign higher education institutions operating in the UK. The Open University operates in all countries of the UK; its headquarters is based in England.

Number of students (by mode of study, 2012/13)

	Undergraduates		Postgraduates		All
	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time	
England	1,140,600	359,270	244,730	200,395	1,944,995
Scotland	136,060	25,965	30,995	21,765	214,785
Wales	77,055	24,110	15,860	11,755	128,780
Northern Ireland	31,960	8,820	4,885	6,050	51,715
UK total	1,385,675	418,165	296,470	239,965	2,340,275

Academic staff at higher education institutions (by academic employment function, 2012/13)

	Full-time	Part-time	Total
Teaching only	10,730	36,065	46,795
Teaching & Research	75,710	18,890	94,600
Research only	34,810	7,540	42,350
Neither teaching nor research	1,250	590	1,840
Total	122,500	63,085	185,585

Source: Universities UK (UUK) website - *Overview of the higher education sector* (Retrieved on 21 January 2013): <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/UKHESector/Pages/OverviewsSector.aspx>

Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) *All students by HE institution, level of study, mode of study and domicile 2012/13. Summary of academic staff (excluding atypical) in UK HE institutions 2012/13:* <http://www.hesa.ac.uk/content/view/1897/239/>

4. Admission

Determination of student numbers

In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, overall student numbers for the higher education sector as a whole are determined by the government. The higher education funding bodies make allocations to institutions to meet overall student number plans and set targets for student numbers to institutions. The purpose of these targets is to ensure that institutions deliver teaching activity for the funding provided.

For a few subject areas, there is a greater degree of central control. Undergraduate medical and dental courses are subject to quotas, in order to ensure that the number of medical and dental students required to meet national needs is delivered. Nursing and midwifery provision is largely funded by the health authorities which contract with institutions for the delivery of specified numbers of trainee nurses and midwives.

Entry/admission requirements

The traditional requirement for entry to degree study is two or three General Certificate of Education Advanced-level (GCE A-level) passes, as well as a minimum number of General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) passes at grade C or above. These remain the most common form of entry qualification held by young entrants to higher education. However, many entrants to higher education are now older (over 21) and many such mature entrants hold other qualifications.

A wide range of other qualifications is acceptable for entry. They include GCE A-levels in applied subjects (formerly Vocational Certificates of Education (VCEs), Edexcel BTEC National Qualifications and the International Baccalaureate. In Wales, a Welsh Baccalaureate qualification is available in several schools and colleges; the Advanced qualification is also acceptable for entry to higher education institutions.

Access courses provide another route, particularly for mature entrants. These programmes were

originally designed for students over the age of 21 without formal qualifications but, since 2003-04, the lower age limit has been reduced to 19. Some access courses provide guaranteed entry to specific undergraduate courses on successful completion. The Access to Higher Education Diploma (Access to HE Diploma) is conferred to those who completed an access course.

Most institutions also welcome applications from mature candidates who have had appropriate experience but may lack formal qualifications. Many institutions give credit for prior study and informal learning acquired through work or other experiences (Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) or Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL)).

It is the individual institution that determines the admissions requirements for each programme. These requirements are set out in the institution's undergraduate prospectus. Many courses require some or all of the qualifications for entry to be in specific subjects or range of subjects and at specific grades. Institutions and programmes vary in terms of the competition for places. For some highly oversubscribed programmes, such as medicine, dentistry, veterinary science and law, applicants may be required to take an additional admissions test. Examples of such tests include the Bio Medical Admissions Test and the UK Clinical Aptitude Test.

In 2002, the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) introduced a points scoring system for expressing entry requirements to higher education. The 'UCAS Tariff' establishes agreed comparability between different types of qualifications including Scottish and Irish qualifications, the Welsh Baccalaureate, the International Baccalaureate and some vocational qualifications. However, higher education institutions are not obliged to express their entry requirements in these terms.

In all cases it is the individual institution which decides which applicants will be offered a place.

Admissions procedures

UCAS is the single clearing-house for applications for admission to full-time undergraduate (first cycle) courses at all higher education institutions in the UK. UCAS is a company limited by guarantee and a charity. UCAS does not set admissions requirements or decide on the admission of individual students, but provides information to prospective students on the choice of course, institution and entry qualifications normally required.

Applications must be made to UCAS by 15 January for entry the following September (by 15 October for applications to Oxford or Cambridge universities, or to courses of medicine, dentistry or veterinary medicine). Applicants may only submit one UCAS application form in each year's application cycle, although the application form may include up to five courses (only four for medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine or veterinary science courses).

As well as grades obtained in nationally recognised qualifications, the application form requires a personal statement from the applicant and a reference which assesses the applicant's suitability for higher education. Students who wish to enter higher education straight from school or college apply before they have obtained their final qualifications, and the school or college reference

therefore includes predicted grades. Based on this information, and sometimes after interviewing applicants, each institution named on an application form decides whether to make an offer. If the applicant has not yet obtained their qualifications, the offer will be conditional, and will specify the grades that must be obtained. When examination results are published in mid-August, the institution confirms the offer of a place if the applicant has met the conditions. If the applicant holds no offers, or if the offer(s) are not confirmed, she/he is eligible for 'Clearing', a UCAS service that matches applicants without places to courses with vacancies.

UCAS does not handle applications for part-time or postgraduate courses; for these programmes applicants must apply direct to the institution.

In Scotland, the usual entry requirement for higher education courses is a group of awards at grades A-C in the National Qualifications Higher or Advanced Higher level examinations set by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), or qualifications deemed by a higher education institution to be equivalent to these. For many higher education courses the candidate needs to hold awards at specified levels. Awards in GCSE and GCE Advanced Level (or the equivalent) are also accepted. For some higher education courses, particularly Higher National Certificate (HNC) and Higher National Diploma (HND), a group of appropriate National Certificate (NC) awards (often achieved in college courses) may be acceptable.

UCAS processes most applications for entry to higher education institutions in Scotland. It distributes them to the individual institutions and enables candidates to apply to several institutions on one form. For some courses, for example in art and design and in social work, there are other arrangements, which are detailed in the Entrance Guide to Higher Education in Scotland. Applications from outside Scotland to pursue a higher education course are considered individually to ascertain the acceptability of entry qualifications.

The higher education institutions welcome applications from mature students (defined as applicants over the age of 21) as well as from school leavers. A range of specially designed courses prepare adults both for higher education in general and for particular courses. Such "access" courses include a range of SQA units or courses, successful completion of which may lead to an SQA award. Many "access" courses guarantee a place in higher education on successful completion.

Source: EACEA Eurypedia: http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/eurypedia_en.php

Access to Higher Education Website: <https://www.accesstohe.ac.uk/>

UCAS Website - How to add an Access course to your application:

<http://wwwucas.com/how-it-all-works/mature-students/applying-university-or-college>

5. Courses and qualifications

1) Courses and qualifications

Higher technical education courses

Courses leading to the Higher National Diploma (HND), Higher National Certificate (HNC) and Diploma in Higher Education (DipHE) are for higher technician, managerial, and supervisory level. Courses take one or two years to complete. In Foundation degrees were introduced in September 2001 to provide graduates with the relevant knowledge and skills for business. A full-time course usually takes two years and it aims to address the shortage of intermediate-level skills and to widen participation in higher education and stimulate lifelong learning. Foundation degree awarding powers can also be awarded to institutions in the further education sector by the Privy Council for a limited period of time, six years in the first instance.

[Typical higher education qualifications within higher technical education courses]

- Foundation degrees
- Diplomas of Higher Education (DipHE)
- Higher National Diplomas (HND)
- Higher National Certificates (HNC)

Undergraduate courses

The normal minimum age for an undergraduate to start a course is 18, or 17 in Scotland. First degree courses generally take three years in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Sandwich courses, which include periods of practical work in organisations outside the university or college, usually last four years, as do certain specialist courses. Some vocational degrees require longer educational training years, for example medicine, dentistry and architecture. In Scotland undergraduate programmes are offered both on a three-year basis, leading to a general degree, and on a four-year basis, leading to an honours degree.

[Typical higher education qualifications within undergraduate courses]

- Bachelor's degrees with honours
- Bachelor's degrees (or first degree)
- Professional Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE)
- Graduate diplomas
- Graduate certificates

Postgraduate courses

Postgraduate courses vary greatly. They can be taught, or conducted through research programmes, or a combination of both, and can be part-time or full-time. Postgraduate taught programmes usually last one year full-time or two years part-time. Research programmes normally last three years for full-time students and over four years for part-time students. These normally require the student to complete a written thesis.

In 2001, alternatives to traditional PhD courses introduced. The programmes will be completed over three to four years, and will combine a specific research project with a coherent programme of formal coursework in the chosen subject area and training in research. Students will also have the opportunity to develop the personal qualities and advanced skills necessary to make them attractive to prospective employers or enable them to enter an academic career.

[Typical higher education qualifications within postgraduate courses]

- Doctoral degrees
- Master's degrees
- Integrated master's degrees
- Primary qualifications (or first degrees) in medicine, dentistry and veterinary science
- Postgraduate diplomas
- Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE)
- Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE)
- Postgraduate certificates

2) Credit and qualifications framework

There are two types of national frameworks for the UK general and vocational qualifications - the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) covering England, Wales and Northern Ireland and the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF).

On the other hand, there are frameworks for the UK higher education qualifications - the framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ) and the framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland (FQHEIS) - and these frameworks correspond with QCF or SCQF respectively.

In the context of higher education, these frameworks describe the main attributes of major qualifications -the levels of achievement they represent. The frameworks are designed to ensure that universities use the titles of qualifications consistently and as a tool to ensure that they assign the appropriate level to new qualifications that they are developing. They therefore provide a crucial set of points of reference for setting and assessing the standards of their courses. In this way they also assist external examiners and QAA (the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education) reviewers. They are also intended as a guide for prospective students and employers so they can see how different qualifications relate to one another and thus what might be the next step in their progression.

Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF)

In 1997, the National Qualification Framework (NQF) was introduced in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and was replaced by the Qualification and Credit Framework (QCF) in 2011. The QCF has been developed jointly and is regulated jointly by the Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator (Ofqual) for England, the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and

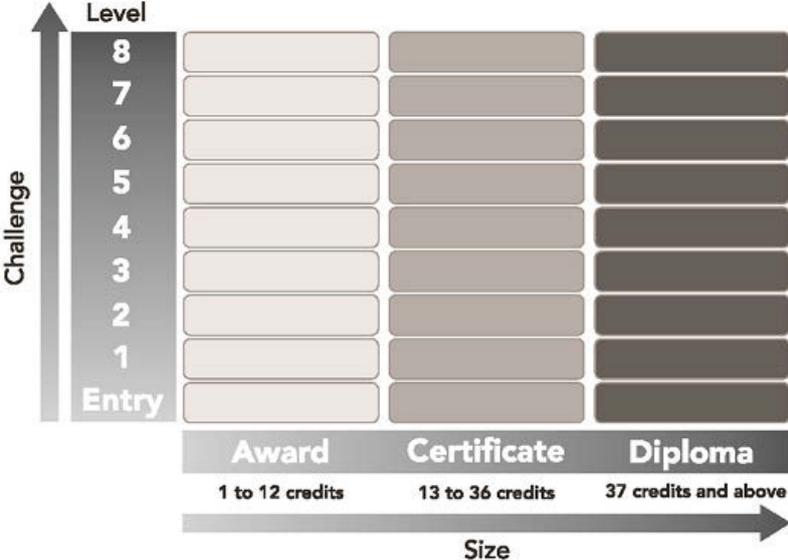
Assessment (CCEA) for North Ireland and the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (CELLS) for Wales.

QCF incorporate vocational education and training and general and secondary education. QCF includes only qualifications which have been accredited by Ofqual, DCELLS and CCEA. All vocational qualifications consist of units, each of which has a credit value that allows the learner to roughly predict how long he or she will need to achieve the desired qualification considering that one credit equals 10 hours of learning.

'Size' - These foresee three types of qualifications that are awarded on the basis of accumulated credit points: award (1-12 credits), certificate (13-36 credits) and diploma (37 credits or more). One credit roughly equals 10 learning hours which allows the learners to evaluate how much time they will need to gain the desired qualification.

'Level' - QCF has eight levels (numbered 1-8) and also support qualifications at lower levels (entry levels 1, 2 and 3); of these levels 4 to 8 represent the types of work undertaken in higher education: the credit level of 8 is typical of the learning expected of a doctorate; 7 - a masters degree; 6 - the last part of a bachelors degree; 5 - the last part of a Foundation Degree; middle part of a bachelors degree; and 4 the first part of HE study.

Figure: The structure of the QCF



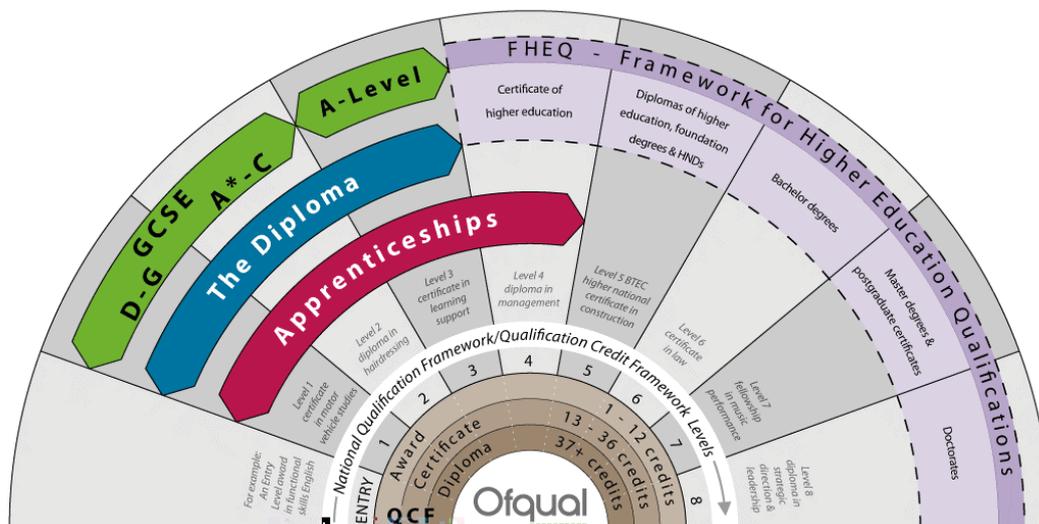
Source: The Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator (Ofqual) (2008) *Regulatory arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework*.

QCF is designed to allow the learners to transfer their credit points. For example, a learner who wants to continue education or start a new learning programme therefore may not need to start all over again and repeat the learning he or she has already undertaken but simply continue the learning. The ability of credit transfer, however, does not mean that the accumulated credit points are automatically accepted by another learning institution or awarding body. How many and if any credits at all will be accepted depends on individual education institutions and of course, the acquired qualification and subject content.

Higher education qualifications that are granted by universities and other higher education institutions – such as Bachelor’s Degree, Master’s Degree and Doctorates are covered by the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) introduced in 2001. FHEQ is separate from QCF that comprise general education and vocational qualifications and has been developed by the QAA. The FHEQ has five framework levels, three of which are undergraduate and two are postgraduate. The levels of the FHEQ are numbered 4-8, and higher level qualifications (at levels 4 to 8) provided in QCF compare with the corresponding levels of the FHEQ (please see the figure below and the table on page 21). For more information of the example of the qualification title at the each level of FHEQ, please see III-4-2) Quality Code, page 40.

The fundamental premise of the UK frameworks for higher education qualifications is that qualifications are awarded on the basis of demonstrated achievement of outcomes (expressed in terms of knowledge, understanding and abilities) and attainment rather than years of study. Qualification descriptors are key to this premise. The qualification descriptors contained in the UK frameworks for higher education qualifications describe the threshold academic standard for those qualification types in terms of the levels of knowledge and understanding and the types of abilities that holders of the relevant qualification are expected to have. The programme learning outcomes are required to align with the relevant qualification descriptor. The qualification descriptors provide a point of reference that can help higher education institutions determine at which point in the framework individual short courses might be placed.

Figure: The structure of the QCF and the relationship with FHEQ



Source: The Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator (Ofqual) website - *Explaining Qualifications*: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/www.ofqual.gov.uk/2368.aspx>

The FHEQ is a qualifications framework, based on the outcomes represented by the main qualification titles. It is not an integrated credit and qualifications framework, nor is its use dependent on credit. This is because not all degree-awarding bodies in England use credit.

However, the credit framework provides guidance on the minimum credit requirements associated with the typical qualifications at each level of the relevant UK framework for higher education

qualifications. The guidance in credit frameworks supports a consistent approach to the award of credit across the higher education sector.

UK higher education institutions that use credit as a unit of academic performance have agreed that one credit represents 10 notional hours of learning. The number of notional hours indicates how long it will take for a typical student to achieve these learning outcomes. All types of learning are included in the estimate of notional hours of learning, including formal classes, self study, revision and assessment. Credits are awarded to students who have shown that they have successfully completed a module, unit or qualification, which means students need to meet the specific set of learning outcomes for the unit, module or qualification. Also, a student must reach the minimum standard, known as the threshold or pass, in the assessment(s). The minimum standard expected for a pass is set out in a higher education institution's assessment regulations.

Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)

In the Scotland, the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) is introduced similar to QCF, and maintained by the SCQF Partnership. The SCQF has 12 levels; of these levels 7 to 12 represent the types of work undertaken in higher education: the credit level of 12 is typical of the learning expected of a doctorate; 11 - a masters degree; 9 to 10 - the last part of a bachelors degree; 8 - the last part of a Foundation Degree; middle part of a bachelors degree; and 7 - the first part of HE study. Just like the QCF, the SCQF is based on awarding credit points for completion of units. One credit point represents about 10 hours of learning.

Scotland also have the Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland (FQHEIS), which have been developed by the QAA. FQHEIS is a constituent part of the SCQF and therefore refers to credit requirements; the credit arrangements in the FQHEIS/SCQF apply to all degree-awarding bodies in Scotland. As the FQHEIS is nested in the SCQF, the numbering of the levels are those of the SCQF and start at 7 reflecting the different numbers of levels in general and secondary education in Scotland. For more information, please see the table below or III-4-2) Quality Code, page 40.

In the FQHEIS, qualification descriptors also make explicit the general expectations of the purpose and outcomes of the main qualifications at each level, and make clear how these differ from other qualifications, both at that level and at other levels. Qualification descriptors are in three parts. The first part is a general description of the qualification. The second part is a statement of general outcomes, achievement of which students should be able to demonstrate for the award of the qualification. The third part is a statement of the wider abilities that the typical student could be expected to have developed. It will be of assistance to employers and others with an interest in the general capabilities of holders of the qualification. The qualification descriptors provide a point of reference that can help higher education institutions determine at which point in the framework individual short courses might be placed.

Comparative table of Qualifications and Credit Framework in UK

Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ)* [for England, Wales and Northern Ireland] Level**	Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) / National Qualification Framework (NQF) [for England, Wales and Northern Ireland] Level	Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)/ Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland (FQHEIS)** [for Scotland] Level
8 Doctoral Degrees	8 Vocational Qualifications Level 8	12 Doctoral Degrees, Professional Apprenticeship, Professional Development Award (PDA), Award
7 Master's Degrees, Integrated Master's Degrees, Postgraduate Diplomas, Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE), Postgraduate Certificates	7 Vocational Qualifications Level 7	11 Master's Degrees, Integrated Master's Degrees, Professional Apprenticeship, SVQ 5, PDA, Postgraduate Diplomas, Postgraduate Certificates, Award
6 Bachelor's Degrees with Honours, Bachelor's Degrees, Professional Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE), Graduate Diplomas, Graduate Certificates	6 Vocational Qualifications Level 6	10 Bachelor's Degrees with Honours, Professional Apprenticeship, PDA, Graduate Diplomas, Graduate Certificates, Award
5 Foundation Degrees, Diplomas of Higher Education (DipHE), Higher National Diplomas (HND)	5 Vocational Qualifications Level 5, Higher National Diplomas (HND)	9 Bachelor's/Ordinary Degrees, Technical Apprenticeship, PDA, SVQ 4, Graduate Diplomas, Graduate Certificates, Award
4 Higher National Certificates (HNC), Certificates of Higher Education (CertHE)	4 Vocational Qualifications Level 4, Higher National Certificates (HNC)	8 Higher National Diploma (HND), Diplomas of Higher Education (DipHE), Technical Apprenticeship, PDA, SVQ 4, Award
* For more information of the example of the qualification title at the each level of FHEQ, please see III-4-2) Quality Code, page 40.	3 Vocational Qualifications Level 3, GCE AS and A Level, Advanced Diplomas (England)	7 Higher National Certificate (HNC), Modern Apprenticeship, PDA, SVQ 3, Certificates of Higher Education (CertHE), Scottish Baccalaureate, Advanced Higher, Award
** The framework levels of the FQHEIS are numbered 7-12.	2 Vocational Qualifications Level 2, GCSEs at grade A*-C, ESOL skills for life, Higher Diplomas (England), functional skills Level 2 (England) (English, mathematics & ICT), Essential Skills Qualifications (NI)	6 Higher, Modern Apprenticeship, SVQ 3, PDA, National Progression Award (NPA), National Certificate, Award
*** The Access to Higher Education Diploma (see II-4. Admission, page 13 and IV-3-2) (4) Access to Higher Education Diploma, page 59) is regulated by QAA but is not part of the FHEQ because it is a full level 3 qualification, which is the same level as GCE A Level and Advanced Diplomas.	1 Vocational Qualifications Level 1, GCSEs at grade D-G, ESOL skills for life, Foundation Diplomas (England), functional skills Level 1 (England) (English, mathematics & ICT), Essential Skills Qualifications (NI)	5 National 5, Intermediate 2, Modern Apprenticeship, SVQ 2, NPA, National Certificate, Award
	Entry Entry Level Certificates (sub levels 1-3), ESOL skills for life, functional skills Entry Level (England) (English, mathematics & ICT), Essential Skills Qualifications (NI)	4 National 4, Intermediate 1, SVQ 1, NPA, National Certificate, Award
		3 National 3, Access 3, NPA, National Certificate, Award
		2 National 2, Access 2, NPA, National Certificate, Award
		1 National 1, Access 1, Award

Source : Created by NIAD-UE based on the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). (2014). *Qualifications can cross boundaries*

3) Transcripts

Each higher education institution can provide its student with a record of their accumulated credits. In many cases this is in the form of a transcript that is produced annually, on completion of the programme, or both. This record can be a particularly useful document for students who want to take a break from learning and return to study later, or transfer their credits.

The forms of these transcripts vary according to the institutions. However, as part of the Bologna Process, which aims to create greater consistency and compatibility within European higher education, the orientation of all UK higher education institutions are now moving towards issuing the European Diploma Supplement.

The Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR), which is an electronic document issued by higher education institutions to students on graduation, is increasingly used these days. It provides a detailed record of a student's academic and extra-curricular achievements to supplement the traditional degree classification. The Higher Education Academy (HEA) provides the main support for the implementation and maintenance of HEAR and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) has provided funding for the development of the HEAR.

4) Degree awarding powers

In the UK, higher education academic qualifications are not national awards, but are granted by individual institutions. All universities have the legal power to develop their own courses and award their own degrees, and determine the conditions on which they are awarded. Some higher education colleges and specialist institutions without these powers offer programmes, with varying extents of devolved authority, leading to the degrees of an institution which does have them.

5) Student assessment - to test intended learning outcomes

In higher education, 'assessment' describes any processes that appraise an individual's knowledge, understanding, abilities or skills. There are many different forms of assessment, serving a variety of purposes. The QAA provides guidance in its UK Quality Code for Higher Education, Chapter B6: Assessment of students and the recognition of prior learning. The Quality Code sets out the following Expectation about assessment which higher education institutions are required to meet.

'Higher education providers operate equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment, including for the recognition of prior learning, which enable every student to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the credit or qualification being sought.'

It provides a series of indicators considered important in designing and implementing assessments of student achievement of intended learning outcomes.

Source: EACEA Eurypedia: http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/eurypedia_en.php

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) (2014) *Qualifications can cross boundaries*: <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/qualifications-can-cross-boundaries.pdf>

The Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator (Ofqual) website - *Explaining Qualifications*. <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+www.ofqual.gov.uk/2368.aspx>

The Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator (Ofqual) (2008) *Regulatory arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework*.

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) website - *Background to SCQF*: <http://scqf.org.uk/about-us/background-to-scqf/>

Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) (2005) *Higher Education in the United Kingdom*.

Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) *Higher Education Achievement Report*: <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/whatwedo/lt/enh/hear/>

The Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR): <http://www.hear.ac.uk/>

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) (2006) *Academic credit in Higher Education in England*.

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) (2013) *Quality Code - Chapter B6: Assessment of students and the recognition of prior learning*.

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) (2014) *Qualifications can cross boundaries*: <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/qualifications-can-cross-boundaries.pdf>

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) (2014) *UK Quality Code for Higher Education, Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards: The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies*.

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) (2014) *The framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland*.

Universities UK (UUK) (2008) *Quality and standards in UK universities: A guide to how the system works*.

The City and Guilds of London Institute (2009) *An Introduction to the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF)*: <http://www.sctp.org.uk/documents/QCF-intro-booklet-web.pdf>

Accredited Qualifications website: <http://www.accreditedqualifications.org.uk/>

Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) website: <http://scqf.org.uk/the-framework/scqf-credit-points/>

6. Responsible authorities and higher education related bodies

Government departments

Government departments are responsible for overall public policy towards higher education. They are the source of the public funds that support higher education institutions.

- In England: Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) >> <http://www.bis.gov.uk>
- In Scotland: The Scottish Government >> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk>
- In Wales: The Welsh Assembly Government >> <http://www.wales.gov.uk>
- In Northern Ireland: Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) >> <http://www.delni.gov.uk>

Higher education funding councils

In England, Wales and Scotland, government funds are distributed by higher education funding councils. They act as intermediaries between Government departments and higher education institutions.

- Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) >> <http://www.hefce.ac.uk>

- Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) >> <http://www.hefcw.ac.uk>
- Scottish Funding Council (SFC) >> <http://www.sfc.ac.uk>
- Northern Ireland Assembly >> <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk>

Representative organisations

- Universities UK (UUK) >> <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk>
UUK promotes and supports the work of UK universities.
- GuildHE >> <http://www.guildhe.ac.uk>
Represents higher education colleges in England and Northern Ireland. Works alongside UUK and other sector bodies with a vision of a distinct and diverse higher education sector in the UK.
- Higher Education Wales >> <http://www.hew.ac.uk>
Represents higher education institutions in Wales.
- Universities Scotland >> <http://www.universities-scotland.ac.uk>
Represents higher education institutions in Scotland.

Quality assurance organisation

- Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) >> <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/>

[Note] Organization recognized as a designated body for accreditation/review for the enrollment of international students: UK providers which accept the enrollment of international students who will be studying under student visa are required to be accredited or reviewed as educational oversight by one of the following designated body for getting sponsor status by home office. See also III-5-3) Educational Oversight, page 49.

○ Designated Accreditation Body

- Accreditation UK: for the English language services
- Accreditation Body for Language Services (ABLS): for the English language services
- The British Accreditation Council (BAC): for independent further and higher education and training providers
- Accreditation Service for International Colleges (ASIC): for schools, colleges, universities and online learning providers

○ Designated body for Educational Oversight review (included the QAA)

- Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted): for England
- Education Scotland: for Scotland
- Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales (Estyn): for Wales
- Education and Training Inspectorate: for North Ireland
- Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI)
- Bridge Schools Inspectorate
- School Inspection Service

Organisation for recognition of qualification

- UK NARIC >> <http://www.ecctis.co.uk/naric/>
UK NARIC is the UK's National Agency responsible for providing information and opinion on academic, vocational and professional qualifications from across the world.

Mission groups

The universities in the UK are diverse in their missions and location. A number of these have formed groups with common interests. These include the various regional university associations and also the so-called 'mission groups'. The mission groups include the following:

- The Russell Group >> <http://www.russellgroup.ac.uk/>
The Russell Group represents 24³ leading UK universities which are committed to maintaining the very best research, an outstanding teaching and learning experience and unrivalled links with business and the public sector. University of Cambridge and University of Oxford are included. Their aim is to ensure that their universities have the optimum conditions in which to flourish and continue to make this impact through their world-leading research and teaching. The group is so-called because it traditionally met at the Russell Hotel, London.
- Million+ >> <http://www.millionplus.ac.uk/>
Million+ is a university think-tank. They work to help solve complex problems in higher education and to ensure that policy reflects the potential of the UK's world-class university system. It mainly comprises post-1992 universities.
- The University Alliance >> <http://www.unialliance.ac.uk/>
University Alliance was formed in 2006 (adopting the name in 2007) to take a solutions-based approach to issues affecting the current health and long-term sustainability of the higher education sector. University Alliance brings together 20⁴ of the most innovative and entrepreneurial universities in the UK. Alliance universities are leading an innovative approach to creating entrepreneurial learning and research environments in partnership with industry and the professions.

Source: Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) (2005) *Higher Education in the United Kingdom*.

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) (2009) *An introduction to QAA*.

Universities UK (UUK) website - *Links for students*: <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/linksforstudents/>

UK visas and immigration (2014) *Tier 4 of the Points Based System Guidance for Sponsors*:
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/347285/Document3_Sponsor_Duties_and_Compliance_01-07-14.pdf

British Council website: <http://www.educationuk.org/japan/articles/16-and-under-choosing-a-school/>

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) website - *UK regulatory bodies*:
<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us/corporate-governance>

³ Retrieved from the website of Russell Group on <http://www.russellgroup.ac.uk/> (as of August 1st, 2014)

⁴ Retrieved from the website of the University Alliance on <http://www.unialliance.ac.uk/> (as of August 1st, 2014)

7. Student union/association

A students' union is a student organisation dedicated to managing the social and organisational activities of the student body. Many students' unions are run by students for students, independent of the university. The purpose of the organisation is to represent students' views within the university and sometimes on local and national issues. It is also responsible for providing a variety of services to students. Students can get involved in its management, through numerous and varied committees, councils and general meetings, or become one of its elected officers. Typical posts include president and vice president, treasurer and secretary, social committee and publicly posts and officers or representatives for women, men, equal opportunities.

Not all universities are part of the National Union of Students (NUS), but most have a union. NUS is a voluntary membership organisation which makes a real difference to the lives of students and its member students' unions. It is a confederation of 600 students' unions, amounting to more than 95 percent of all higher and further education unions in the UK. Through its member students' unions, it represents the interests of more than seven million students.

In Scotland, the Student Participation in Quality Scotland (SPARQS) performs as an agency which puts students at the heart of decisions being made about the quality and governance of the learning experience. SPARQS are funded by the Scottish Funding Council, hosted and managed on their behalf by NUS Scotland, and directed by a Steering Committee with sector-wide membership.

Source: Higher Education and Research Opportunities (HERO) website - *Student unions:* <http://www.hero.ac.uk>

National Union of Students (NUS) website - *About NUS:* <http://www.nus.org.uk>

Student Participation in Quality Scotland (SPARQS) website - *About us:* <http://www.sparqs.ac.uk/>

8. Tuition fees

Tuition fees charged to full-time undergraduate (first cycle) home and EU students are regulated by government in each administrative part of the UK. Fees charged to part-time students, all overseas students and all postgraduate students are not regulated and are determined by the institution. Under the Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998, full-time undergraduate students beginning a course in the academic year 1998/99 were required for the first time to pay means-tested tuition fees of up to £1,000.

In England, the Higher Education Act 2004 allowed higher education institutions in England to charge variable tuition fees of up to £3,000 per year from the academic year 2006/07. Since changes to the regulations prescribing the maximum annual amount for tuition fees from the academic year 2012/13 were approved by Parliament in December 2010, institutions will be able to charge tuition fees of up to £9,000. They will be able to charge above the basic fee (see below table) if they will be in place to improve access and student retention is approved by OFFA.

In Wales, tuition fees raised from the academic year 2006/07 only for students coming from

elsewhere in the UK, though Welsh and non UK EU students were not affected. However, following the announcement of plans to allow institutions in England to increase tuition fees, the Welsh Government approved regulations allowing institutions in Wales to charge higher fees of up to £9,000 for all students from the academic year 2012/13. Only HEIs who have had their fee plan approved by HEFCW will be able to charge the higher rate of fees.

In Northern Ireland, tuition fees did not change in 2006. However, following the announcement of plans to allow institutions in England to increase tuition fees, an Assembly debate and a public consultation on future policy in Northern Ireland were held. The Northern Ireland Executive announced that fees would rise only in line with inflation. In the 2012/13 academic year, universities in Northern Ireland can charge up to £3,465 for tuition fee to students coming from Northern Ireland and non-UK EU student. If students come from the rest of the UK, universities in Northern Ireland will charge students variable fees up to a maximum of £9,000. Only HEIs who have had their fee plan approved by the Department for Employment and Learning will be able to charge the higher rate of fees.

In Scotland, payment of tuition fees from all Scottish students were abolished in 2000. The amount of basic tuition fees for the academic year 2014/15 is £1,820, however, tuition fees paid by the Scottish Government through the Student Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS)⁵ if students are a Scottish resident and/or a qualifying non-UK EU student. On the other hand, for students coming from the rest of the UK, universities in Scotland will charge variable fees up to a maximum of £9,000.

Amount of the tuition fees (Maximum/Basic) (As of the academic year 2014/15)

	Maximum fee		Basic fee
	Home/EU	Rest of UK	
England	£9,000		£6,000
Wales	£9,000		£4,000
Northern Ireland	£3,685	£9,000	£1,465
Scotland	-	£9,000	£1,820

Source: EACEA Eurypedia: http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/eurypedia_en.php

The Complete University Guide website:

<http://www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk/university-tuition-fees/>

The Official Gateway to Scotland website - Fees, funding and Visa applications:

<http://www.scotland.org/study-in-scotland/fees-funding-and-visa-applications/>

The Scotland Government website - Financial help for students:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Education/UniversitiesColleges/16640/financial-help>

Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) (2010) *The Impact of Higher Education Finance on University Participation in the UK.*

National Archives website: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/>

⁵ For more information of Student Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS), please see II-9. Financial support for students, page 29.

9. Financial support for students

The main sources of help for full-time students are student loans, non-repayable grants, and bursaries from universities and colleges. Student loans and grants in the United Kingdom are primarily provided by the government through the Student Loans Company (SLC), a non-departmental public body.

Financial support by the Student Loans Company (Student loans and grants)

The Student Loans Company is a non-profit making Government-owned organisation set up in 1989 to provide loans and grants to students in universities and colleges in the UK. Most undergraduate university students resident in the United Kingdom are eligible for student loans.

SLC's core function is to provide financial support to students across the UK, but there are differences in the way this is administered in the four countries of the UK. This is because England, Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland have separate policies on student finance. SLC also support students from European Union countries.

Financial support for students for each countries of the UK is as below.

[Financial support in England, Northern Ireland and Wales]

In England, Northern Ireland and Wales, students apply financial support to the agency of the each administrative Government - Student Finance England, Student Finance NI and Student Finance Wales - and student loans and grant are paid through SLC. The type of student loan and grant is as following:

<Student Loans>

All eligible students can get help with tuition fees and living costs through Student Loans. Students will be able to take out two student loans per academic year: a Student Loan for Tuition Fees, and a Student Loan for Maintenance (living costs).

- Student Loan for Tuition Fees: Tuition fee loans are paid directly to university or college and cover the full amount of fees. The Government's policy is that these loans should be available on favourable conditions. Interest rates are indexed to inflation rates and borrowers repay, in real terms, broadly the same amount as that borrowed. Borrowers who commenced higher education in or after 2012 are not required to repay the amount until they have graduated and are earning over £21,000 a year.
- Student Loan for Maintenance: How much students can get depends on where they decide to live and study, as well as their income and that of their household. It will also depend on how much of the Maintenance Grant they are entitled to.

Maximum student loans for maintenance for England (As of the academic year 2014/15)

	Maximum annual loan available
If a student lives away from his/her parents' home and (s)he studies in London	£7,751
If a student lives away from his/her parents' home and (s)he studies outside London	£5,555
If a student lives at his/her parents' home	£4,418

<Maintenance grants>

These are non-repayable grants to help with general living costs and available to those full-time students from lower income families. The amount of the grant varies according to student's household income as well as where they decide to live and study. For example, in England, from September 2014, full-time students with a household income of £25,000 or less are eligible for the full grant of £3,387 per year, with partial grants available to those with a household income of up to £42,620.

[Financial support in Scotland]

In the Scotland, the Students Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS) is an agency of the Scottish Government giving financial support to all eligible students doing a course of higher education in the UK. SAAS offers financial support for students mainly in Scotland as following:

<Payment of tuition fees>

In Scotland, the payment of tuition fees from students are a Scottish resident and/or a qualifying non-UK EU student were abolished, and tuition fees paid by the Scottish Government through the SAAS direct to your college or university.

<Student Loans>

For most students, the main support for living costs will be through the student loan, which is partly income-assessed. SAAS assesses students' entitlement, sends students an award notice to tell students how much loan students will get and send students' loan information electronically to the SLC. The SLC will pay your loan in monthly instalments straight into your bank or building society account. The SLC will expect students to repay 9% of your annual income over £16,910.

Loan amounts available (As of the academic year 2014/15)

	Household income	Loan
Dependent students	£0 to £33,999	£5,750
	£34,000 and above	£4,750
Independent students	£0 to £23,999	£6,750
	£24,000 to £33,999	£6,250
	£34,000 and above	£4,750

<Living-costs grant>

The extra support student can get depends on students' personal circumstances. These grants are normally only available if you study full-time. Students do not have to pay back the living-costs grants. For Dependants' Grant, SAAS will pay up to £2,640 a year, and for Lone Parents' Grant, SAAS will pay up to £1,305 a year.

Bursaries from universities and colleges

Individual institutions may also provide additional discretionary support to some students. Much of this support is in the form of means-tested bursaries, but some institutions also provide non needs-based financial support.

Grants for part-time students

The main sources of financial help for part-time students are different from those available to full-time students. Depending on their circumstances, they may be able to apply for the part-time fee grant and course grant. How much they can get depends on their household income and personal circumstances.

Source: EACEA Eurypedia - Higher Education Funding:

http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/eurypedia_en.php

GOV.UK website - Education and learning: Student finance, loans and universities:

<https://www.gov.uk/student-finance>

Students Loan Company website - Products and services:

<http://www.slc.co.uk/about-us/what-we-do/products-and-services.aspx>

Students Loan Company website - About us:

<http://www.slc.co.uk/about-us.aspx>

Student loan repayment website:

http://www.studentloanrepayment.co.uk/portal/page?_pageid=93,3866794&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTALS

Student Finance NI website: <http://www.studentfinancenl.co.uk/>

Student Finance NI (2014) *A guide to Financial support for full-time students in higher education 2014/15.*

Student Finance Wales website: <http://www.studentfinancewales.co.uk/>

Student Finance Wales (2014) *Applying for student finance 2014/15.*

Students Awards Agency for Scotland website - About us:

http://www.saas.gov.uk/about_us/index.htm

Students Awards Agency for Scotland (2014) *Guide to undergraduate support 2014-2015.*

The Scotland Government website - Financial help for students:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Education/UniversitiesColleges/16640/financial-help>

10. Modes of study

Courses offered by UK universities and colleges can often be studied in a number of different ways - as a full-time student, a part-time student or by distance learning.

Full-time study

Timetabled hours (those taken up with scheduled lectures, seminars, tutorials etc.) will vary from course to course. Hours may also vary from term to term (or from year to year) as teaching elements or modules change. As well as timetabled hours, many courses will stipulate a required number of self-directed study hours that are deemed necessary to succeed in the course.

Part-time study or flexible study

Not all higher education courses are available on a part-time basis, but a good many are. This is particularly true of postgraduate, vocational and non-degree courses.

Distance learning

The growth of the internet has enabled many people (from both the UK and around the world) to study with UK universities and colleges through distance learning. Many institutions provide online university classes and courses. Distance learning courses are available at many levels, including degree and postgraduate qualifications.

*Source: Higher Education and Research Opportunities (HERO) website - choosing your mode of study:
<http://www.hero.ac.uk>*

11. Legislations

- Education Reform Act 1988
- Further and Higher Education Act 1992
- Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992
- Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998
- Higher Education Act 2004
- Higher Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2005
- Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005
- Post-16 Education(Scotland) Act 2013
- Further and Higher Education (Governance and Information) (Wales) Act 2014

III. The quality assurance system

1. Summary of the UK quality assurance system

The UK higher education is characterized by a diversity and complexity of the system. There are four systems, one in each of the administrative parts of the UK: in England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. The differences in the systems are real and they reflect different national settings and structures, but the similarities across the UK are greater, especially in relation to the principles that underpin responsibilities for quality assurance, that is, each higher education institution has the responsibility for assuring the quality of the education it provides and the standards of the qualification it offers.

Institutions have their own internal quality assurance processes to address their responsibilities, principally, through the design and approval, monitoring and review of their programmes, and also in the assessment of students' learning and achievements. In addition, they are expected to have externality in their internal processes. This is through the involvement of external experts in the approval of their programmes and the involvement of external examiners in the assessment of their students' learning.

Thus, the assurance of standards and quality in the UK is led by the higher education institutions themselves. In addition, they are externally checked and assured by QAA's schemes and other initiatives. In UK, the funding bodies, respectively, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL), the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), and Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council (SFC), are legally responsible for securing that provision is made for assessing the quality of education provided in institutions for whose activities they provide, or are considering providing, financial support. Quality assessment in the UK is currently conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) under contract to the UK funding bodies. Publicly funded higher education institutions, Further Education colleges providing higher education that is directly funded by the HEFCE, and non-publicly funded bodies that hold renewable UK degree-awarding powers are required to subscribe to QAA. In QAA's mission to safeguard standards and improve the quality of UK higher education, QAA works in close partnership with a wide range of higher education providers.

The underlying principle for external quality assurance is that it should provide public confidence that higher education institutions are exercising their responsibilities for the academic standards and quality of what they are offering. External review activities are one component in the quality assurance framework (non-legislative), which comprises four elements:

- External reviews:
 - England/N. Ireland: Higher Education Review (HER)
 - Wales: Higher Education Review: Wales (HER: Wales)
 - Scotland: Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR)

- UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code)
- Published information about quality and standards in individual institutions
 - Teaching quality information
- Student surveys

In Scotland, a Quality Enhancement Framework has been in place since 2003 with the following five elements:

- Engagement of students in quality arrangements
- An agreed set of public information
- Institutions run institution-led quality review (which has an annual and periodic timing to it as well as a subject focus)
- A sector-level suite of enhancement themes activity
- External review in the form of Enhancement-Led Institutional Review

Besides these elements, a number of external quality assurance schemes have been undertaken by the funding bodies, the Higher Education Academy, professional, statutory and regulatory bodies, and other related bodies.

Source: National Institution for Academic Degrees and University Evaluation (NIAD-UE) (2008) *University Evaluation Forum, Presentation by Carolyn Campbell, Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education.*

Universities UK (UUK) (2008) *Quality and standards in UK universities: A guide to how the system works.*

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) (2012) *Enhancement-led Institutional Review: Handbook (Third edition).*

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) (2014) *Higher Education Review: A handbook for QAA subscribers and providers with access to funding from HEFCE undergoing review in 2014-15.*

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) (2014) *Higher Education Review: Wales A handbook for providers.*

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) website - *Corporate governance:*
<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us/corporate-governance>

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) website - *Subscribing institutions:*
<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us/subscribing-institutions>

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) website - *Applying to QAA:*
<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us/subscribing-institutions/applying-to-qa>

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) website - *Higher Education Review:*
<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review>

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) website - *Higher Education Review - Wales:*
<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Pages/Higher-Education-Review-Wales.aspx>

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) website - *Enhancement-led Institutional Review:*
<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/enhancement-led-institutional-review>

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) website - *Development and enhancement:*
<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us/scotland/development-and-enhancement>

2. History of quality assurance in UK higher education

Quality assurance before 1990

Prior to the early 1990s, university programmes and awards were not subject to any external monitoring or regulation other than the use of external examiners, and (as now) each institution was responsible for ensuring the quality and standards of its own programmes. However, higher education delivered by polytechnics and some higher education colleges was externally quality assured by the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) worked with polytechnics, approving degree programmes and carrying out institutional reviews.

The Academic Audit Unit 1990-92

A series of efficiency studies initiated by the universities themselves in the late 1980s led to the establishment of an Academic Standards Group. In 1990 the universities themselves established the Academic Audit Unit (AAU) to take forward the recommendations of the Academic Standards Group. The AAU undertook peer-review academic audits of universities, scrutinising key areas where academic standards were set and monitored. Reports were published on a voluntary basis and contained no formal judgements or recommendations.

Quality assurance 1992-97: HEQC and the higher education funding councils

In 1992, the passing of the Further and Higher Education Act led to a number of fundamental changes in the way higher education in the UK was structured and funded. First, the Act abolished the binary system of polytechnics and universities and a sector-owned Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC) was established, with the task of auditing all institutions' management of their internal quality assurance processes. Secondly, the three new UK funding councils were established by the Act and they set up their own quality assessment committees to manage the quality of the work that they funded. Subject-based inspection models, called 'teaching quality assessments' (later 'subject reviews'), were introduced by all the funding councils.

1997 - 2010

External subject reviews were always controversial with higher education institutions which complained about cost, burden, and also the duplication of effort with the separate institutional audit procedure of HEQC.

In 1996 a Joint Planning Group was convened from the funding councils and the representative bodies of universities and colleges to try to design a unified quality assurance system that combined the two strands of audit and subject review. Although no feasible unified review method emerged, a single quality assurance agency was established in 1997 as QAA. This brought together the HEQC and the quality assessment functions of the funding councils.

The 1997 Dearing Report considerably expanded the duties of the new agency beyond the undertaking of assessments and audits to include the provision of public information on quality

assurance; verification of standards; creation and maintenance of a higher education qualifications framework; development of a code of practice; provision of benchmark standards; and the creation of a pool of external examiners. Although not all of these proposals were adopted, most were, and QAA's position as the UK's sole agency with responsibility for the assurance and enhancement of the quality and standards of higher education was consolidated.

Between 1997 and 2001 QAA continued operating both subject reviews and academic audits and developed most of the Dearing proposals, including the elements of the academic infrastructure and a new, UK-wide review process, to be called 'academic review'. This was to have comprised elements of both subject review and institutional audit and envisaged a gradual transition from the former to the latter.

In 2001, despite the fact that there had been general acceptance of the academic review proposal across the UK and QAA had already begun to use the process in Scotland, a number of English universities complained to the Government that this new approach did not meet their demands for a lighter burden of external quality assurance and would perpetuate the high costs and limited benefits that they perceived in the previous arrangements. As a result of these representations, the Government declared publicly that there would be a reduction in the volume of reviewing undertaken by QAA. No forewarning of this decision had been given to the Scottish or Welsh higher education authorities, however, and their response was to disengage from the UK-wide scheme and set up their own national review/audit arrangements: enhancement-led institutional review in Scotland; institutional review in Wales; and institutional audit in England and Northern Ireland. The English subject review cycle was completed in 2001 and then discontinued.

As part of the 2001 agreement between the key stakeholders about the future of external quality assurance in England, it was agreed that there should be a transitional period of three years, between 2002 and 2005, when all English higher education institutions should be audited using the new method.

Thereafter, the institutional audit in England and Northern Ireland begun in 2006 is operated on a six-yearly cycle. The institutional review in Wales begun in 2003 took place on a six-year cycle, and the enhancement-led institutional review in Scotland begun in 2003 on a four-year cycle.

2011 to the present

In 2011, the UK Government published a White Paper, *Students at the Heart of the System*, which proposed a number of significant higher education policy changes. One of the proposed changes was the introduction of a more risk-based approach to quality assurance in England (and potentially Northern Ireland). The White Paper proposed that, in future, the nature, frequency and intensity of external quality assurance would be guided by each higher education provider's record in quality assurance and the nature of its provision.

From September 2011, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) introduced a new process for reviewing academic quality and standards in higher education in England and Northern

Ireland. The process was called Institutional Review and, except in Scotland, replaced the previous method (Institutional Audit). Key principles of Institutional Review were student-centred quality assurance, flexibility, clarity and simplicity, clear recognition of the importance of public information and minimising the administrative burden. Institutional Reviews consisted of a core element, which led to judgments, and a thematic element which did not result in a judgment but looked at a particular aspect of the student experience in more depth. The grades used were 'commended', 'meets UK expectations', 'requires improvement to meet UK expectations', and 'does not meet UK expectations'.

Except in Scotland, Institutional Review was replaced by Higher Education Review (HER) in England and Northern Ireland from the academic year 2013/14, and by Higher Education Review: Wales (HER: Wales) in Wales from the academic year 2014/15. HER is closely based on the Expectations of the Quality Code. It uses the same judgement grades as its immediate predecessor and, also like Institutional Review, includes.

Source: The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) (2008) Self-Evaluation, External Review for Confirmation of Full Membership of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.

National Institution for Academic Degrees and University Evaluation (NIAD-UE) (2008) *University Evaluation Forum, Presentation by Carolyn Campbell, Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education.*

Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) website: <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/>

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) (2011) *Summary of Institutional review in England and Northern Ireland.*

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) (2011) *Institutional review of higher education institutions in England and Northern Ireland, Operational description.*

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) (2012) *Enhancement-led Institutional Review: Handbook (Third edition).*

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) (2013) *Self-Evaluation Report of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, External Review for Confirmation of Full Membership of ENQA.*

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) (2014) *Higher Education Review: A handbook for QAA subscribers and providers with access to funding from HEFCE undergoing review in 2014-15.*

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) (2014) *Higher Education Review: Wales A handbook for providers.*

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) website - *Higher Education Review:* <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review>

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) website - *Higher Education Review - Wales:* <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Pages/Higher-Education-Review-Wales.aspx>

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) website - *Enhancement-led Institutional Review:* <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/enhancement-led-institutional-review>

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) website - *Development and enhancement:* <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us/scotland/development-and-enhancement>

3. Internal quality assurance

Each degree awarding body is responsible for its own quality and standards. Individual institutions have the primary, longstanding and legal responsibility for managing their quality to ensure that their students have a good experience and for maintaining standards to protect the value and currency of awards. Universities fulfil their responsibilities for assuring standards and

quality through:

- regulations for awarding degrees and other qualifications;
- procedures for the design, approval, monitoring and review of the courses of study they offer;
- the assessment of students, which includes making use of external examiners;
- mechanisms designed to engage and involve students, with the aim of involving them as 'co-creators in their own learning', in all aspects of quality assurance;
- responding to feedback and interaction with students, employers and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies;
- exchanging good practice, and dialogue with other universities and QAA, and participation in collective quality initiatives; and
- cooperation with the QAA and funding council requirements for regular institutional review, including the provision of publicly available information.

Each university discharges these responsibilities with reference to the UK Quality Code and QAA. QAA, in turn, refers to the effectiveness of the institution's arrangements for securing academic standards and enhancing the quality of the student experience.

External examiners

All UK universities have long made use of a network of independent and impartial academic advisers, called external examiners. External examining provides one of the principal means for maintaining nationally comparable standards within autonomous higher education institutions, the external examiner being one of a number of independent and impartial advisers used by them. The mechanisms employed by institutions to maintain and enhance academic standards will vary, depending on individual mission, size, curriculum structures and other factors. However, that all institutions will use external examiners to help them monitor the academic standards of their awards, except those granted on an honorary basis. External examiners provide institutions with informed comment on the standards set and student achievement in relation to those standards.

External examiners are drawn from other institutions, or from areas of relevant professional practice. External examiners report to the Vice-Chancellor of the university on whether the standards set are appropriate, by referring both to their experience of standards in other universities, and to the Quality Code established by the QAA. External examiner reports have significant status within the university. They are directed to the Vice-Chancellor and are considered at, and used by, the department and university in internal quality assurance committees.

Source: The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) (2004) Code of practice for the academic quality and standards in higher education, Section 4: External examining.

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) website - The UK Quality Code for Higher Education: <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code>

Universities UK (UUK) (2008) Quality and standards in UK universities: A guide to how the system works.

4. External quality assurance framework

1) Higher Education Review and Enhancement-led Institutional Review

In addition to their own systems for safeguarding standards and enhancing the quality of their provision, universities are also subject to a rigorous external review process conducted by QAA. In UK, the funding bodies, HEFCE, DEL, HEFCW and SFC, are legally responsible for securing that provision is made for assessing the quality of education provided in institutions for whose activities they provide, or are considering providing, financial support. Quality assessment in the UK is currently conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) under contract to the UK funding bodies. Publicly funded higher education institutions, Further Education colleges providing higher education that is directly funded by the HEFCE, and non-publicly funded bodies that hold renewable UK degree-awarding powers are required to subscribe to QAA. In QAA's mission to safeguard standards and improve the quality of UK higher education, QAA works in close partnership with a wide range of higher education providers.

The QAA undertakes regular, formal, external reviews of universities, called 'Higher Education Review' in England and Northern Ireland, 'Higher Education Review: Wales' in Wales, and 'Enhancement-led Institutional Review' in Scotland. The process of each review by QAA is described on IV. The details of quality assurance organisation: Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), on page 50. The review arrangements by QAA have been developed and evolved in each administrative part of the UK. The overview, main characteristics and differences between each arrangement are indicated below:

Review teams

- England/N. Ireland: Review teams consist of peer reviewers and at least one current or recent student.
- Scotland: Review teams consist of peer reviewers, one current or recent student, and one international reviewer.
- Wales: The arrangements are the same as for England and N. Ireland (see above).

Target and cycle

- England/N. Ireland: The interval between reviews is six years for providers who have undergone at least two previous QAA reviews, the latest of which was successful. Providers without such a strong record are reviewed four years after their last engagement with QAA, or sooner (see below under Judgements).
- Scotland: involving all university sector institutions over a four-year cycle.
- Wales: The arrangements are the same as for England and N. Ireland (see above).

Self-assessment document

- England/N. Ireland: Self-evaluation document (SED).
- Scotland: Reflective analysis (RA). Universities use it to document their entire range of

quality assurance and enhancement activities.

- Wales: Self-evaluation document (SED).

Student submissions

- England/N. Ireland: Student representatives are expected to make a separate submission of their own alongside the institution's document.
- Scotland: Students do not make a separate submission, but are involved at each stage of the institutional process of preparing and submitting the RA.
- Wales: Students are encouraged to make a separate submission. Each provider supports their student representative body to produce an Annual Student Statement and this statement can inform the student submission during the review.

Visits

- England/N. Ireland: There is one visit to the provider; its duration is between one day and five days.
- Scotland: Visits usually last between five and seven days, in two parts
- Wales: Visits usually last five days.

Judgments

- England/N. Ireland: Review teams make judgements on the setting and maintenance of academic standards, the quality of students' learning opportunities, the enhancement of students' learning opportunities, and information about higher education provision. The judgements relate to whether the Expectations of the Quality Code are met in relation to the above four areas. The judgment on the setting and maintenance of academic standards is expressed as one of the following: 'meets UK expectations', 'requires improvement to meet UK expectations' or 'does not meet UK expectations'. The judgments on learning opportunities, information and enhancement are each expressed as one of the following: 'commended', 'meets UK expectations', 'requires improvement to meet UK expectations' or 'does not meet UK expectations'.
- Scotland: An overarching judgement is made about the effectiveness of the institution's arrangements for managing academic standards and the student learning experience.
- Wales: The arrangements are the same as for England and N. Ireland (see above).

Recommendations

- England/N. Ireland: The published report includes the review team's recommendations for consideration by the institution. The review team may indicate that a recommendation should be addressed within three months, or before the start of the next academic year, and so on.
- Scotland: Areas of positive practice and areas for development are highlighted alongside the overarching judgement.
- Wales: The arrangements are the same as for England and N. Ireland (see above).

Follow-up

- England/N. Ireland: All institutions are expected to produce an action plan. Institutions that have met Expectations are not required to undergo a mid-cycle review, and are not reviewed again for another six years. Those that 'require improvement to meet expectations' must provide updates on the progress of their action plan and will receive a further visit one year on, and another review after four years. Those institutions that fail by a wider margin are required to provide updates on the progress of their action plan and will be reviewed again in the two subsequent years. If any institution fails to meet expectations for a second time it will be subject to an 'unsatisfactory quality procedure'.
- Scotland: One year after publication of the review report, the university provides a written follow-up report to QAA (and the Scottish Funding Council) indicating the ways in which the review outcomes have been addressed. This provides the basis for discussion at the annual meeting each institution has with QAA. In addition, institutions that have been reviewed around the same time, are required to engage in a follow-up meeting to explore with each other the actions they have each taken in response to their respective reviews.
- Wales: The arrangements are the same as for England and N. Ireland (see above). In addition, in Wales, a mid-process student-focused engagement (MSE) takes place three years after the review visit for all institution. The purpose of MSE is to provide feedback on progress since the previous review and of the strengths and weaknesses in the provider's current and future plans for quality assurance and enhancement, with a particular focus on the student experience. Based on an Annual Student Statement provided by student representatives' body and a brief report about actions taken to address the recommendations in the HER: Wales report provided by provider, QAA staff visits the provider for one day. After the visit, QAA provides a brief report setting out the conclusions. The MSE process cannot lead to any modification of the judgments reached by the review team.

2) Quality Code

In the quality assurance framework of higher education in the UK, institutional review and internal quality assurance was formerly conducted on the basis of the "academic infrastructure", which institutions used to guide their policies for maintaining academic standards and quality. Following work with the UK higher education sector, QAA has, since 2011, developed the new set of nationally agreed reference points known as the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code), which replaced the Academic Infrastructure from the 2012-13 academic year. The Quality Code is owned by the UK higher education sector and is published and maintained by QAA on their behalf. QAA works closely with the UK higher education sector to maintain and update it.

The Quality Code gives all higher education providers a shared starting point for setting, describing and assuring the academic standards of their higher education awards and programmes and the quality of the learning opportunities they provide. It applies to all providers of UK higher

education, whether based in the four nations of the UK or in other locations around the world.

The Quality Code relates to the learning and teaching activities of a higher education provider. It does not cover research areas (beyond the provision of research degree programmes), or site management. QAA reviewers use it as the main reference point for their review work.

The Quality Code consists of a series of separate chapters grouped in three Parts⁶.

- Part A: Setting and maintaining academic standards
- Part B: Assuring and enhancing academic quality
- Part C: Information about higher education provision

Each chapter of the Quality Code sets out the Expectations that all providers of UK higher education are required to meet. In addition, each chapter sets out a series of Indicators to help higher education providers meet the relevant Expectations.

Part A: Setting and maintaining academic standards

Threshold academic standards are the minimum acceptable level of achievement that a student has to demonstrate to be eligible for an academic award. These chapters cover the issues relevant to the setting and maintaining of academic standards.

Chapter A1: UK and European reference points for academic standards

Chapter A2: Degree-awarding bodies' reference points for academic standards

Chapter A3: Securing academic standards and an outcomes-based approach to academic awards

Chapter A1 comprises of the existing qualifications frameworks. This chapter covers the framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ), and the framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland (FQHEIS).

The FHEQ and FQHEIS applied to degrees, diplomas, certificates and other academic awards (other than honorary degrees and higher doctorates) granted by a higher education provider in the exercise of its degree awarding powers. The FHEQ and FQHEIS are important reference points for providers of higher education. The FHEQ and FQHEIS have been written to assist higher education providers to maintain academic standards; to inform international comparability of academic standards, especially in the European context; to ensure international competitiveness; and to facilitate student and graduate mobility.

The FHEQ and FQHEIS should enable higher education providers to communicate to employers; schools; parents; prospective students; professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs); and other stakeholders for the achievements and attributes represented by the typical higher education qualification titles.

⁶ The Quality Code is subject to ongoing development, and has revised/updated in August 2014. For details, please refer to QAA's website: <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code>

QAA reviewers use the FHEQ and FQHEIS as a reference point when reviewing the establishment and management of academic standards by higher education providers. In particular, reviewers look at how institutions align the academic standards of their awards with the levels referred to in the FHEQ. They also ascertain whether institutions have means of ensuring that awards and qualifications are of an academic standard at least consistent with the standards referred to in the FHEQ.

The FHEQ has five levels, three of which are undergraduate and two are postgraduate. These are numbered 4-8. The FQHEIS has six levels, four of which are undergraduate and two are postgraduate. These are numbered 7-12. The levels of the FHEQ and FQHEIS, with examples of typical qualifications at each level, are represented in the following table.

The fundamental premise of the UK frameworks for higher education qualifications is that qualifications are awarded on the basis of demonstrated achievement of outcomes (expressed in terms of knowledge, understanding and abilities) and attainment rather than years of study. Qualification descriptors are key to this premise. The qualification descriptors contained in the UK frameworks for higher education qualifications describe the threshold academic standard for those qualification types in terms of the levels of knowledge and understanding and the types of abilities that holders of the relevant qualification are expected to have. The programme learning outcomes are required to align with the relevant qualification descriptor. The qualification descriptors provide a point of reference that can help higher education institutions determine at which point in the framework individual short courses might be placed.

FHEQ links at the each level of the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) covering England, Wales and Northern Ireland. FQHEIS links to the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). QCF and SCQF are national frameworks for have been cover the UK skills and qualifications including the higher education qualifications. For more information about QCF and SCQF, please see II-5-2) Credit and qualifications framework, page 17.

Increasingly, higher education institutions, students and employers operate and compete in a European and international context. The frameworks for higher education qualifications throughout the UK are designed to meet the Expectations of the Bologna Declaration and thus align with the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (FQ-EHEA)⁷. As such, the labels used to distinguish the different levels of the FQ-EHEA (short cycle, first cycle, second cycle and third cycle) have also been incorporated into the FHEQ. A European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF) has also been agreed by the European Commission and it is expected that the FHEQ and FQHEIS will also be compatible with this framework.

⁷ FQ-EHEA adopts the overarching framework for qualifications in the EHEA, comprising three cycles (First cycle: Bachelor, Second cycle: Master, Third cycle: Doctor), generic descriptors for each cycle based on learning outcomes and competences.

The relationship between the levels of the FHEQ, FQHEIS and the cycles of the FQ-EHEA

Typical higher education qualifications within each level*	FHEQ Level**	FQHEIS Level***	Corresponding FQ-EHEA cycle
Doctoral degrees (eg, PhD/Dphil, EdD, DBA, DClinPsy)	8	12	Third cycle (end of cycle) qualifications
Master's degrees (eg, MPhil, MLitt, MRes, MA, MSc)	7	11	Second cycle (end of cycle) qualifications
Integrated master's degrees (eg, MEng, MChem, MPhys, MPharm)			
Primary qualifications (or first degrees) in medicine, dentistry and veterinary science (eg MB ChB, MB BS, BM BS; BDS; BVSc, BVMS)			
Postgraduate diplomas			Intermediate qualifications within the second cycle
Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) and Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE)			
Postgraduate certificates			
Bachelor's degrees with honours (eg, BA/BSc Hons)	6	10	First cycle (end of cycle) qualifications
Bachelor's degrees			
Professional Graduate Certificate in Education (ProfGCE)		9	Intermediate qualifications within the first cycle
Graduate diplomas			
Graduate certificates			
Foundation Degrees (eg, FdA, FdSc)	5	N/A	Short cycle (within or linked to the first cycle) qualifications
Diplomas of Higher Education (DipHE)		8	
Higher National Diplomas (HND)		N/A	
Higher National Certificates (HNC)	4	N/A	Intermediate qualifications within the short cycle
Certificates of Higher Education (CertHE)		7	

* The Access to Higher Education Diploma (see II-4. Admission, page 13 and IV-3-2) (4) Access to Higher Education Diploma, page 59) is regulated by QAA but is not part of the FHEQ because it is a full level 3 qualification, which is the same level as GCE A Level and Advanced Diplomas.

** The framework levels of the FHEQ are numbered 4-8, succeeding levels 1-3 which precede higher education in the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF).

*** As the FQHEIS is nested in the SCQF, the numbering of the levels are those of the SCQF.

Source: The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) (2011) *The UK Quality Code for Higher Education, Chapter A1: The national level*: <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/quality-code-A1.pdf>

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) (2014) *UK Quality Code for Higher Education, part A: setting and maintaining academic standards: the UK frameworks for higher education qualifications: draft for consultation*.

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) (2014) *UK Quality Code for Higher Education, Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards: The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies*.

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) (2014) *The framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland*.

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) (2014) *Qualifications can cross boundaries*: <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/qualifications-can-cross-boundaries.pdf>

Part B: Assuring and enhancing academic quality

Academic quality is concerned with how well the learning opportunities made available to students enable them to achieve their award. These chapters cover the issues relevant to ensuring that the quality of learning opportunities meets expectations and is continually being improved.

Chapter B1: Programme design, development and approval

Chapter B2: Recruitment, selection and admission to higher education

Chapter B3: Learning and teaching

Chapter B4: Enabling student development and achievement

Chapter B5: Student engagement

Chapter B6: Assessment of students and the recognition of prior learning

Chapter B7: External examining

Chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review

Chapter B9: Academic appeals and student complaints

Chapter B10: Managing higher education provision with others

Chapter B11: Research degrees

Part C: Information about higher education provision

Public confidence in higher education relies on public understanding of the achievement represented by higher education qualifications. It addresses how providers make available information that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

Part C: Information about higher education provision is structured around the following purposes for which higher education providers produce information.

- To communicate the purposes and value of higher education to the public at large.
- To help prospective students make informed decisions about where, what, when and how they will study.
- To enable current students to make the most of their higher education learning opportunities.
- To confirm the achievements of students on completion of their studies.
- To safeguard academic standards and assure and enhance academic quality.

3) Teaching quality information

The publication of information about quality and standards in individual higher education institution is one component in the quality assurance framework. It is to help potential students (and their parents and advisers) make choices about where to study. The information has been published on the Teaching Quality Information (TQI) website, now re-launched as Unistats.

The HEFCE owns the Unistats website on behalf of all higher education funding councils in the UK.

Unistats is the official site that allows you to search for and compare data and information on university and college courses from across the UK. It started in 2007 and the website was revised in 2012. The site draws together comparable information on those areas that students have identified as important in making decisions about what and where to study. The items that students thought were most useful have been included in a Key Information Set (KIS).

The Key Information Set (KIS) comprises the items of information for student satisfaction ratings, graduate salaries and employment, tuition fees and financial support, and the cost of accommodation.

The higher education (HE) White Paper 'Students at the Heart of the System' (June 2011) set out the expectation that higher education institutions would provide a standard set of comparable information about their courses (the Key Information Set), by September 2012.

The site draws on the following official data on higher education courses:

- Student satisfaction from the National Student Survey
- Student destinations on finishing their course from the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education survey
- How the course is taught and study patterns
- How the course is assessed
- Course accreditation
- Course costs (such as tuition fees and accommodation)

These data have been provided by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), the Data Service, universities and colleges and Ipsos MORI (National Student Survey).

The items in the KIS and where the items come from are given in the table below:

<p>Results from the following NSS questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff are good at explaining things • Staff have made the subject interesting • Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of my course • I have received sufficient advice and support with my studies • Feedback on my work has been prompt • Feedback on my work has helped me clarify things I did not understand • The library resources are good enough for my needs • I have been able to access general IT resources when I needed to • I am satisfied with the Students' Union (Association or Guild)
Proportion of time spent in various learning and teaching activities - by year/stage of study, with a link to further detail
Proportion of summative assessment by method - by year/stage of study
Professional, statutory and regulatory bodies that recognise this course, details of the type of recognition with a link to further detail
Institution owned/sponsored accommodation: average annual costs - upper and lower quartiles, and

number of units (to which students can reasonably expect to have access).
Private rental accommodation: average annual costs - upper and lower quartiles
Financial support available from the institution: whether it offers a fee waiver; means-tested support; non means-tested support; National Scholarship Programme; and a link to more detailed information
Average fees (excluding fee waivers) per year by country of UK domicile
The destinations of graduates six months after completing their course - comprising working, studying, working and studying, unemployed, and not available for work
Of those in employment, the proportion in managerial/professional jobs six months after graduation.
Salary data for those in full-time employment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • upper quartile, median and lower quartile six months after graduation from the course at the institution displaying the KIS • regionally adjusted upper quartile, median and lower quartile for the subject across all institutions six months after graduation • regionally adjusted upper quartile, median and lower quartile for the subject across all institutions at 40 months after graduation

4) Student surveys

The National Student Survey is a national initiative, conducted annually since 2005. The survey runs across all publicly funded higher education institutions in England, Wales, Northern Ireland, and higher education institutions in Scotland participating. (In case of Scotland, the certain number of the institutions is chosen to take part.) Additionally, since 2008, further education colleges with directly funded higher education students in England have been eligible to participate.

The survey asks final year undergraduates and students in their final year of a course leading to undergraduate credits or qualifications to provide feedback on their courses in a nationally recognised format. There are 22 main questions about the following aspects of the student learning experience and one question about the students' union, using closed multi-choice questions: 'Definitely agree', 'Mostly agree', 'Neither agree nor disagree', 'Mostly disagree', 'Definitely disagree' and 'Not applicable'.

Aspects and questions

- The Teaching on my course
(ex. Staff are good at explaining things.)
- Assessment and feedback
(ex. The criteria used in marking have been clear in advance.)
- Academic support
(ex. I have received sufficient advice and support with my studies.)

- Organisation and management
(ex. The timetable works efficiently as far as my activities are concerned.)
- Learning resources
(ex. The library resources and services are good enough for my needs.)
- Personal development
(ex. The course has helped me to present myself with confidence.)
- Overall satisfaction
(ex. Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of the course.)

Students are also given the opportunity to write in positive and/or negative comments on their student learning experience as a whole at their university/college. If they provide comments at the end of the questionnaire, their comments may be passed on, anonymously, to their institution to help them identify how they can make improvements.

The results from the main 22 questions are made available for prospective students and their advisors on the Unistats website to help them make informed choices of what and where to study. The results are also made available to participating universities, colleges and students' unions to use to facilitate best practice and to enhance the student learning experience.

The survey has been commissioned by HEFCE on behalf of the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), the Department for Employment and Learning, Northern Ireland (DEL), the Training and Development Agency and Skills for Health. Ipsos MORI, an independent research agency, administers the survey. The survey is fully supported by the National Union of Students (NUS) and other student unions.

Source: The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) (2012) *The UK Quality Code for Higher Education : A brief guide.*

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) (2012) *Enhancement-led Institutional Review: Handbook (Third edition).*

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) (2013) *Higher Education Review (Plus): A handbook for providers.*

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) (2014) *Higher Education Review: A handbook for QAA subscribers and providers with access to funding from HEFCE undergoing review in 2014-15.*

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) (2014) *Higher Education Review: Wales A handbook for providers.*

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) (2014) *Consultation on the UK frameworks for higher education qualifications.*

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) website - *Corporate governance:*
<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us/corporate-governance>

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) website - *Subscribing institutions:*
<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us/subscribing-institutions>

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) website - *Applying to QAA:*
<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us/subscribing-institutions/applying-to-qa>

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) website - *The UK Quality Code for Higher Education:* <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code>

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) website - *Higher Education Review:*
<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review>

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) website - *Higher Education Review - Wales:*
<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Pages/Higher-Education-Review-Wales.aspx>

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) website - *Enhancement-led Institutional*

Review:

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/enhancement-led-institutional-review>

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) website - *Development and enhancement:*
<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us/scotland/development-and-enhancement>

The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) website:
<http://www.ehea.info/article-details.aspx?ArticleId=65>

EACEA *Eurypedia:* http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/eurypedia_en.php

Unistats website: <http://unistats.direct.gov.uk/>

The National Student Survey website: <http://www.thestudentsurvey.com/>

5. Other quality assurance initiatives

1) Research assessment

The four UK higher education funding bodies (HEFCE, SFC, HEFCW, DELNI) have been developing a replacement for the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), which is the system for assessing the quality of research in UK higher education institutions for funding of research. The new arrangements, the Research Excellence Framework (REF), will build on the experience of the RAE. The REF will be implemented by 2014.

The REF is a process of expert review. The primary purpose of the REF is to produce assessment outcomes for each submission made by institutions. HEIs will be invited to make submissions in 36 units of assessment. Submissions will be assessed by an expert sub-panel for each unit of assessment, working under the guidance of four main panels.

The REF will make greater use of quantitative indicators in the assessment of research quality than the RAE, while taking account of key differences between the different disciplines. Assessment will combine quantitative indicators, including bibliometric indicators wherever these are appropriate.

In forming their overall quality judgements, the sub-panels will assess three distinct elements of each submission - outputs, impact and environment. In particular, it is characterized that REF introduce a new element of the economic and social impact of research, as well as impact upon public policy. The weighting of each element is set out below.

(a) Outputs (65%)

The sub-panels will assess the quality of submitted research outputs in terms of their 'originality, significance and rigour', with reference to international research quality standards.

(b) Impact (20%)

The sub-panels will assess the 'reach and significance' of impacts on the economy, society and/or culture that were underpinned by excellent research conducted in the submitted unit, as well as the submitted unit's approach to enabling impact from its research.

(c) Environment (15%)

The sub-panels will assess the research environment in terms of its 'vitality and sustainability', including its contribution to the vitality and sustainability of the wider discipline or research base.

2) Accreditation by professional, regulatory and statutory bodies

Some programmes of study in higher education may lead also to a professional or vocational qualification, for example, in engineering, law, accountancy or medicine. Such programmes are subject to accreditation by the relevant professional, regulatory, or statutory body. This form of accreditation recognises that a programme provides some, or all, of the competencies needed for professional practice.

3) Educational Oversight

Higher Education providers, which accept the enrollment of international students from outside the European Economic Area (EEA) who will be studying under student visa (Tier 4), are required to being reviewed the educational oversight by a designated body for getting 'Highly Trusted Sponsor (HTS)' status. For the list of organization recognised as a designated body for higher education providers by Home Office, please see II-6. Responsible authorities and higher education related bodies, page. 23.

Source: Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) website - *REF 2014 Research Excellence Framework:* <http://www.ref.ac.uk/>

Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) (2012) *Panel criteria and working methods.*

UK visas and immigration (2014) *Tier 4 of the Points Based System Guidance for Sponsors:* https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/347285/Document3_Sponsor_Duties_and_Compliance_01-07-14.pdf

IV. The details of quality assurance organisation: Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA)

1. Overview of the organisation

Name of the organisation	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA)
Character of the organisation	Independent body; a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee
Year of establishment	1997
Location	Southgate House Southgate Street Gloucester GL1 1UB (head office) 183 St Vincent Street, Glasgow, G2 5QD 10-11 Carlton House Terrace, London, SW1Y 5AH Cambrian Buildings, Mount Stuart Square, Cardiff Bay, CF10 5FL
Representative	Anthony McClaran, Chief Executive
Number of staff	150+
Statement of financial activities (for the year ended 31 July 2013) Unit: GBP	<p><u>Total income:</u> 13,614,426</p> <p>Main resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subscriptions from institutions: 4,618,754 • Contracts with HE funding bodies: 6,098,657 <p><u>Total expenses:</u> 13,207, 651</p> <p>Main resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To meet student needs: 1,385,634 • To safeguard standards: 6,726,421 • To drive improvements in UK HE: 3,439,655 • To improve public understanding: 1,449,002
Organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The QAA Board of Directors - 17 members (including one student member and one National Union of Students representative) and four observers • Organisational structure - six groups. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality Assurance - all review activities, including international work, applications for degree-awarding powers, and concerns investigations • Quality Development - academic reference points and guidance; research and analysis; business development; regulation of the Access to Higher Education Diploma • QAA Scotland - all aspects of QAA's work in Scotland <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *The QAA Scotland Committee, which is a subcommittee of the QAA Board of Directors, oversees the operation of QAA Scotland. • Public Engagement Group - communications, publications, public engagement, student engagement, events management. • Resources Group - internal services and resources, human resources, financial planning and strategy • Chief Executive's Group - supports work of the Chief Executive

(As of June 2014)

In UK, the funding bodies, respectively, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL), the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), and Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council (SFC), are legally responsible for securing that provision is made for assessing the quality of education provided in institutions for whose activities they provide, or are considering providing, financial support. Quality assessment in the UK is currently conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) under contract to the UK funding bodies. QAA is funded by subscriptions from universities and colleges of higher education, and through contracts with the main higher education funding councils.

Source: The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) *Director's report and financial statement for the year ended 31 July 2013.*

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) website - *Corporate governance:*
<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us/corporate-governance>

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) website - *Subscribing institutions:*
<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us/subscribing-institutions>

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) website - *Applying to QAA:*
<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us/subscribing-institutions/applying-to-qaa>

Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) website: <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/>

2. Mission and purposes

Mission

QAA's mission is to safeguard standards and improve the quality of UK higher education wherever it is delivered around the world. QAA achieves this by reviewing standards and quality, providing reference points that help to define clear and explicit standards, and promoting a wider understanding of the issues affecting and surrounding higher education.

Aims

To support its mission, QAA has committed to the following three strategic aims for 2014-17.

- Enhance the quality and secure the academic standards of UK higher education wherever it is delivered in order to maintain public confidence.
- Provide leadership, through knowledge and resources, in assuring and enhancing the quality of higher education within the UK and internationally.
- Extend and enhance the value and reach of QAA's services within and beyond UK higher education.

Source: The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) (2008) *Self-Evaluation, External Review for Confirmation of Full Membership of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.*

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) (2014) *STRATEGY 2014-2017.*

3. The work of the organisation

The primary responsibility for academic standards and quality rests with individual institutions. QAA reviews and reports on how well they meet those responsibilities, and encourages continuous improvement in the management of the quality of higher education. QAA does this by:

- conducting external reviews of universities and colleges
- publishing reports stating whether, and how well, providers meet expectations
- offering expert guidance on maintaining and improving quality
- advising the government on applications for degree awarding powers and university title.

1) External review

QAA undertakes regular, formal, external reviews. The review arrangements have been developed and evolved in each administrative part of the UK. The overview and main differences between each arrangement are described on III-4-1) Higher Education Review and Enhancement-led Institutional Review, page 38.

(1) Higher Education Review

Higher Education Review (HER) is the new review method for higher education institutions in England and Northern Ireland from 2013-14 and is also applicable, in a slightly adapted form, in Wales, where Higher Education Review: Wales (HER: Wales) is introduced from 2014/15. It succeeds Institutional Review in all parts of the UK except Scotland, where Enhancement-led Institutional Review remains the current review method. HER has been designed in accordance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.

As one of the major review schemes, the detail of the HER is given below:

Aims of Higher Education Review (HER)

The overall aim of Higher Education Review is to inform students and the wider public as to whether a provider of UK higher education:

- meets UK Expectations for academic standards either directly or through responsibilities delegated by its degree-awarding body/bodies
- provides learning opportunities that meet UK Expectations as set out in the Quality Code
- plans effectively to enhance the quality of its higher education provision
- provides information that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy, for the general public, prospective and current students, and all those with an interest in academic standards and quality

Method of Higher Education Review (HER)

HER is a flexible, risk-based method which applies the greatest scrutiny where it is most needed. Providers with a strong track record in managing quality and standards are reviewed less

frequently and less intensively than providers without such a strong record. It is carried out by peer reviewers - staff and students from other providers.

The interval between reviews is six years for providers who have undergone at least two previous QAA reviews, the latest of which was successful. Providers without such a strong record are reviewed four years after their last engagement with QAA, or sooner (see below under Judgements).

HER has a core element and a thematic element, which are the same for all providers. The core element focuses on academic standards, quality of learning opportunities, steps to improve quality, and provision of information, as described above. The thematic element focuses on an area regarded as particularly worthy of further analysis or enhancement among providers under review and/or the higher education sector more generally. The thematic element will change periodically. Thus, providers reviewed at different times may not experience the same theme.

Review team

The size of the team for the whole review (that is, the desk-based analysis and the review visit) is determined according to the scale of the provision on offer. It comprises a minimum of two reviewers and a maximum of six. At least one reviewer on every team is a member or former member of academic staff from another provider in the UK, and at least one is a current or recent student.

Student reviewers are recruited from among students or sabbatical officers who have experience of participating, as a representative of students' interests, in contributing to the management of academic standards and/or quality.

A QAA officer coordinates the review, supports the review team and acts as the primary point of contact with the provider.

The role of students

Students are key beneficiaries of HER and are at the heart of the review process. Student reviewers are full and equal members of review teams.

Students of the provider under review may also have input to the process by:

- nominating a lead student representative, who is involved throughout the review process
- preparing a student submission, which is a key part of the evidence for the desk-based analysis
- contributing their views directly for consideration during the desk-based analysis
- participating in meetings during the review visit
- assisting the provider in drawing up and implementing the action plan after the review.

The review process

The first contact that a provider will have about its review is likely to be around one year before the review visit. QAA writes to the provider to confirm that they will be having a review and to ask for some information to help QAA schedule the review dates, such as the dates of their academic year

and the dates of major examination periods.

HER takes place in two stages. The first stage is a desk-based analysis by the review team of a wide range of information about the higher education on offer. Some of this information, including the self-evaluation document, is submitted by the provider, some is submitted by students and the rest is assembled by QAA.

The second stage of Higher Education Review is a visit to the provider. The programme for, and duration of, the review visit varies according to the outcome of the desk-based analysis. The review team decides on the duration of the visit according to what the desk-based analysis reveals both about the provider's track record in managing quality and standards and the extent to which it meets the applicable Expectations of the Quality Code. Where this analysis demonstrates a strong track record in managing quality and standards, and that the provider is continuing to manage its responsibilities effectively, the review visit can be relatively short since there should be few issues about which the team would require further information. However, where the analysis does not demonstrate a strong track record, and/or indicates that the provider is not managing its responsibilities effectively (or the evidence provided is insufficient to demonstrate that it is meeting its responsibilities effectively), the review visit will be longer so as to allow the team to investigate its concerns thoroughly.

The activity carried out during the visit will not be the same for every review, but may include contact with staff (including staff from degree-awarding bodies and other awarding organisations where applicable), recent graduates, external examiners and employers. The review visit will include a final meeting between the review team and senior staff of the provider, the facilitator and the lead student representative.

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
- agree any recommendations for action by the provider
- agree any affirmations of courses of action that the provider has already identified.

Judgments

The judgements are made by teams of peers by reference to the Expectations in the Quality Code. The judgement on the setting and maintenance of academic standards is expressed as one of the following: 'meets UK expectations', 'requires improvement to meet UK expectations' or 'does not meet UK expectations'. The judgements on learning opportunities, information and enhancement are each expressed as one of the following: 'commended', 'meets UK expectations', 'requires improvement to meet UK expectations' or 'does not meet UK expectations'. The judgements 'requires improvement to meet UK expectations' and 'does not meet UK expectations' are considered to be unsatisfactory and, therefore, more intensive follow-up action will be required, followed by a follow-up visit or further review.

Recommendations

The published report includes the review team's recommendations for consideration by the institution. The review team may indicate that a recommendation should be addressed within three months, or before the start of the next academic year, and so on.

After the review visit

Six weeks after the end of the review, the provider will receive the draft report on the findings. QAA asks the provider to respond within three weeks, telling them of any factual errors or errors of interpretation in the report. QAA also shares the draft report with the lead student representative and invites his or her comments on it by the same deadline.

Where the draft report contains judgements of 'commended' or 'meets UK expectations' in all four areas, the report will be finalised and published three weeks later (that is, within 12 working weeks of the review visit). The provider will be notified of publication and receive confirmation of their eligibility to use the QAA Quality Mark, and will be provided with the relevant information to enable the provider to do this.

The report will be written as concisely as possible, while including enough detail to be of maximum use to the provider. The report will contain an executive summary to explain the findings to a lay audience.

Action planning

After the report has been published, the provider is expected to provide an action plan, signed off by the head of the organisation, responding to the recommendations and affirmations, and setting out any plans to capitalise on the identified good practice. The provider 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 the provider at the preparatory meeting. The action plan (and commentary, if produced) should be posted to their public website within one academic term or semester of the review report being published. A link to the report page on QAA's website should also be provided. The provider is expected to update the action plan annually, again in conjunction with student representatives, until actions have been completed, and post the updated plan to their website.

Follow-up

All institutions are expected to produce an action plan. Institutions that have met Expectations are not required to undergo a mid-cycle review, and are not reviewed again for another six years. Those that 'require improvement to meet expectations' must provide updates on the progress of their action plan and will receive a further visit one year on, and another review after four years. Those institutions that fail by a wider margin are required to provide updates on the progress of their action plan and will be reviewed again in the two subsequent years. If any institution fails to meet expectations for a second time it will be subject to an 'unsatisfactory quality procedure'.

In addition, in Wales, a mid-process student-focused engagement (MSE) takes place three years after the review visit for all institution. The purpose of MSE is to provide feedback on progress since the previous review and of the strengths and weaknesses in the provider's current and future plans for quality assurance and enhancement, with a particular focus on the student experience. Based on an Annual Student Statement provided by student representatives' body and a brief report about actions taken to address the recommendations in the HER: Wales report provided by provider, QAA staff visits the provider for one day. After the visit, QAA provides a brief report setting out the conclusions. The MSE process cannot lead to any modification of the judgments reached by the review team.

(2) Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR)

ELIR is the peer review method used in Scotland and is designed to form part of a coherent Quality Enhancement Framework of five elements:

- Student engagement in quality
- An agreed set of public information
- Institution-led quality review
- A national set of Enhancement Themes activity
- Enhancement-Led Institutional Review

ELIR and the whole Quality Enhancement Framework, were developed as a result of partnership between key agencies in the Scottish sector including: QAA, Scottish Funding Council, National Union of Students (Scotland) and Universities Scotland. It has been accompanied by method evaluation (carried out by a team of independent researchers from outside Scotland) so that there is evidence of impact from 2003 to the present.

An important feature of the Scottish system, which differs considerably from that in other parts of the UK, is that collaboration between institutions is encouraged and promoted. QAA leads the Enhancement Themes work where this collaboration can be seen clearly. There is a strong international dimension to this work so that the Scottish institutions, collectively, learn from international practice⁸.

ELIR has been operating in Scotland since 2003 with revisions to the method taking place at intervals. The current version (ELIR 3) includes international reviewers on each team and a greater emphasis on the enhancement-led aspect. ELIR reviews take place on a four-cycle so, at the time of writing in July 2014, each Scottish institution has been reviewed at least twice in the ELIR method. Current ELIR reports cover a range of themes under the following areas of institutional activity:

⁸ More information about the enhancement themes can be found on the website:
<http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/>

- Institutional context and strategic framework
- Enhancing the student learning experience
- Enhancement in learning and teaching
- Academic standards
- Self-evaluation and management of information
- Collaborative activity

As part of the ELIR method, there is an annual visit to each institution, led by a senior QAA officer. This is important for relationship building and to discuss matters arising from institution-led quality review. It also provides a key opportunity to discuss action arising from the previous ELIR and planning for the next.

There is a strong analytical reporting process linked to ELIR and the enhancement themes work. QAA produces two sector-wide analytical reports each year, drawing on the outcomes of ELIR, enhancement themes and institution-led review to identify themes across the sector, highlighting positive practice and challenges. In addition, using the outcomes of ELIR and information arising from annual discussions, QAA produces regular thematic reports, to inform both the enhancement themes programme of work and other development work to ensure that areas of challenge for the sector are addressed.

Review team

Each ELIR team comprises six reviewers: three UK-based academics, an international reviewer, student reviewer and a coordinating reviewer. Each ELIR is managed by a senior member of QAA staff.

Review process

The visit is conducted in two-parts which are held around five weeks' apart. During the first visit, the institution being reviewed is responsible for leading one morning of events and discussions to emphasise their particular approach. After that, the ELIR team is responsible for setting and leading the discussions.

Judgements

ELIR results in an overarching judgment on the effectiveness of the institution's arrangements for managing academic standards and the student learning experience. In addition, each ELIR identifies areas of positive practice and areas for development.

Follow-up

One year after publication of the ELIR reports, institutions submit a follow-up report to QAA (and to the Scottish Funding Council). After agreement with the senior QAA office, the report is published alongside the original ELIR report. In addition, institutions that were reviewed around the same time, meet to explore the action they have each taken in response to their respective ELIRs. Themes arising from ELIRs are used to inform the enhancement themes and other developmental activity across the sector.

2) Other works

(1) Educational oversight reviews

Higher Education providers, which accept the enrollment of international students from outside the European Economic Area (EEA) who will be studying under student visa (Tier 4), are required to being reviewed the educational oversight by a designated body for getting 'Highly Trusted Sponsor (HTS)' status⁹. QAA has been recognised as a designated body for higher education providers by Home Office. There are three different Educational Oversight review methods carried out by QAA:

- Review for Educational Oversight (REO): This is for independent colleges that provide higher education programmes in association with awarding bodies and/or awarding organisations. REO will be replaced 'Higher Education Review (Plus)' for all colleges with effect from 1 January 2015.
- Embedded College Review for Educational Oversight (ECREO) is for providers that operate networks of colleges embedded on or near the campuses of two or more UK higher education institutions.
- Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight (RSEO) is for overseas higher education providers operating in the UK.

(2) Review for specific course designation

Review by the QAA is a requirement of alternative providers of higher education that wish to apply for or maintain specific course designation for student support purposes. QAA has been recognised by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) to carry out reviews for this purpose.

The term 'provider' refers to a range of organisations that deliver higher education programmes to students. Some may operate for profit, others may have charitable status. The providers reviewed through this method are not currently subscribers to QAA. The process of review is called Review for Specific Course Designation (RSCD). It focuses on providers that offer higher education programmes in collaboration with awarding bodies/organisations.

It reflects the core principles of QAA review processes. For the purposes of RSCD, only 'confidence' judgements in the management of academic standards and management and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities and 'reliance' in information about learning opportunities are deemed as acceptable outcomes.

(3) Review of overseas provision

Many UK institutions offer higher education programmes through partnership links with organisations abroad, or deliver programmes on overseas campuses. As part of QAA's work, QAA

⁹ More information about HTS can be found on the website.

UK Visas and Immigration: Sponsor a Tier 4 student: guidance for educators:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sponsor-a-tier-4-student-guidance-for-educators>

conducts Review of Overseas Provision for the UK transnational education (TNE). The key reference points used in Review of Overseas Provision can be found in the UK Quality Code for Higher Education. QAA provides guidance for UK higher education institutions about selecting partners and agents through the Quality Code, Chapter B10: Managing higher education provision with others.

The review is conducted on a country by country basis and carried out according to the same principles and processes as our review methods for higher education institutions:

- it is a peer review, evidence-based process
- the UK higher education institution provides a briefing document describing its overseas provision
- overseas review usually involves a one-day visit of a review team to the UK institution to meet staff and students, and a similar visit to the partner institution overseas.

BIS published the policy paper - "International education strategy: global growth and prosperity" in 2013, which covers supporting transnational education and strengthening quality assurance. QAA is working with representatives from universities and colleges, and other stakeholders across the UK to implement an approach to the quality assurance of TNE. The building blocks that will form the basis of the new TNE review method are:

- TNE and institutional review processes that are complementary and closely aligned
- TNE review process that is flexible and cognisant of risk
- greater coverage of TNE provision achieved through more desk-based analysis, combined with video-telephony
- costs mitigated by combining visits so that those needed in a single country or geographic area can be undertaken during the same overseas trip
- the UK approach to student engagement included unless there are compelling reasons not to do so.

(4) Access to Higher Education Diploma

The Access to Higher Education Diploma (Access to HE Diploma) enables adults without other qualifications such as A levels to progress to higher education. Regulated by QAA, the qualification is widely recognised by UK universities and colleges. There are over 1,500 different courses leading to the Access to HE Diploma. Access Validating Agencies (AVAs) validate and review these courses, and award the qualification to successful students. QAA licenses and monitors the work of the AVAs, and publishes information about Access to HE.

For more information about Access to HE Diploma, please see II-4. Admission, page 13 and table on II-5-2) Credit and qualification frameworks, page 21.

(5) Advising government

QAA advises the UK government on the merits of applications for degree awarding powers and university title, but is not responsible for granting them.

The power to award degrees in the UK is regulated by law. It is an offence for an institution to purport to award, or to offer to award a UK degree, unless it is authorised so to do. Older universities are authorised by a number of means including Royal Charter or statute. Two Acts of Parliament in 1992 provided for the Privy Council, which acts on the advice of government, to grant degree-awarding powers and create new universities.

The scrutiny of degree awarding powers and university title applications is one of QAA's most important responsibilities since, in making these recommendations, in each case it is helping to redefine the UK's higher education sector. Applications must be made to the Privy Council which then forwards the submission to the relevant territorial Minister with higher education responsibilities. Applications are then sent to QAA for advice. QAA's remit is to offer confidential guidance on the application, through the appropriate Minister, to the Privy Council.

(6) Supporting developments in higher education

QAA helps institutions enhance their management of quality and standards by publishing and sharing the intelligence and guidance gained from the full range of its work. Review reports are analysed to identify themes of good practice and difficulties commonly encountered, with findings published to stimulate discussion and debate and promote improvement. Publications are available on QAA's website.

In Scotland, as part of the Quality Enhancement Framework, Enhancement Themes are planned and developed in partnership with the higher education sector. They encourage the identification and sharing of good practice delivered locally and worldwide, generating ideas and examples of practice with the aim of enhancing the student experience. The themes provide a key reference point for the Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR) process. Institutions refer to the themes in their self-evaluation and ELIR teams consider the effectiveness of institutions' engagement with the themes.

(7) International work

QAA takes a leading role in international developments in standards and quality, enjoying a close relationship with quality assurance agencies around the world. It works with a wide range of government and other bodies across the UK to inform and support the higher education sector in the light of international developments. Overseas review activity helps to improve confidence in the work of UK universities and colleges operating internationally.

QAA is fully confirmed as a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), established as part of the Bologna Process to encourage and develop the exchange of information on quality assurance throughout Europe. QAA was first independently

reviewed in April 2008 for ENQA membership purposes and its full compliance with, and membership of, ENQA was confirmed after its subsequent review in May 2013. ENQA's report stated that QAA's overall performance is uniformly high: 'It is a trustworthy, effective and highly credible agency and a leader in the field. QAA is well-led and well-managed at both Board and Executive levels. The Panel has been consistently impressed by the calibre and professionalism of all those contributing to the work of QAA'. Additionally, in 2013, QAA was added to the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR).

Also, QAA is a full member of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE). In 2014 INQAAHE found QAA to be comprehensively aligned with the INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice.

Source: The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) (2009) *An introduction to QAA*.

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