

**Report of the Panel appointed to undertake a review of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (UK) for the purposes of full membership of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)**

**Final Report  
July 2008**

## Overview

### Introduction

1 The regulations of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) require all member agencies to undergo an external review at least once every five years. External reviews are expected to include consideration of how far agencies meet the criteria for full membership of ENQA.

These criteria are identical to the European Standards and Guidelines in Quality Assurance (ESG) in the European Higher Education Area, adopted by Ministers in Bergen in 2005. Conformity with the ESG will also in due course constitute the criterion for inclusion on a Register of Quality Assurance Agencies, the establishment of which was agreed at the London ministerial summit held in May 2007.

Membership of both the Association and the Register requires a satisfactory external review; one review is expected to be sufficient to cover both purposes. In line with the principle of subsidiarity which underpins the ESG, the five-yearly reviews are normally expected to be conducted at national level. This review was therefore commissioned at a national level by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE\*). HEFCE has acted as lead partner and convenor of a Steering Group which was established to bring together all funding agencies for UK higher education and other key stakeholders. The Steering Group was given responsibility by the parent bodies for selecting and commissioning a review panel to carry out the review of the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA).

ENQA has identified for its own purposes two types of nationally co-ordinated external review. These are:

- a) a review whose sole purpose is to fulfil the periodic external review requirement of ENQA membership; and
- b) a review which has a number of purposes, one of which is to fulfil the periodic external review requirement of ENQA membership.

This review has been conducted as a Type 'A' review, namely a review with the sole function of carrying out an assessment to fulfil the periodic external review requirement for ENQA membership.

### Terms of Reference for the Review

2 The purpose of this 'Type A' review was to establish the extent to which the QAA complies with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), in order for it to fulfil the periodic external review requirement for membership of ENQA.

In fulfilling this purpose the review was asked to consider the following core tasks and operations of the QAA:

- England and Northern Ireland: Institutional audit, collaborative provision audit
- Scotland: Enhancement-led institutional review (ELIR)
- Wales: institutional review
- Overseas audit

(\* Footnote: HEFCE, together with HEFCW for Wales and the Scottish Funding Council were set up under Statute by the UK Government in 1992 as 'non-departmental public bodies' to distribute public money to universities and colleges providing higher education in the respective countries of the UK)

### **Membership of the Panel**

3 The members of the Panel were:

David Sherlock CBE (Chair), (Director 'Beyond Standards' Ltd.; former chief inspector of adult learning (not HE) for England)

Colin Baker (HEI representative, Wales), (Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Bangor University)

Keith Bartlett (HEI representative, England), (Deputy Principal, Norwich School of Art and Design)

Jim Birch (Stakeholder representative), (Head of International Recognition, Engineering Council)

Liam Burns (Student representative), (President, Heriot-Watt University Students' Association)

Andrea Nolan (HEI representative, Scotland), (Vice-Principal, University of Glasgow)

Christian Thune (External QA expert/International), (lately Executive Director of the Danish Government's Evaluation Institute for Danish Education)

Paul Mitchell (Secretary to the Panel), (Independent HE Consultant)

### **Approach**

4 The review was conducted through a transparent process managed independently of the QAA. The Panel sought to conduct the Review in a professional and courteous way, but in a manner which was both constructively searching and challenging. The review process as a whole proceeded smoothly and responsively. During the site visits, the Panel was met throughout with unfailing courtesy and by a willingness at all levels to engage in discussion and exploration of key issues.

### **Methodology**

5 In fulfilling the purposes of the review the Panel has:

- considered the broader context within which QAA operates
- considered as requested the development and operation of the following specific QAA functions:
  - England and NI: institutional audit, collaborative provision audit
  - Scotland: enhancement-led institutional review (ELIR)
  - Wales: institutional review
  - Overseas audit
- considered a self-evaluation document prepared by QAA
- sought additional documentation relevant to the Panel's lines of enquiry, both before and during the site visit
- during a three-day site visit to QAA's offices in Gloucester and Glasgow (20-23 April 2008) (Appendix 1) met with a range of stakeholders (determined by the Panel) representative of all UK operations, including:
  - QAA Board members
  - Chief Executive, divisional Directors, divisional Deputy Directors and Assistant Directors of QAA
  - QAA auditors/reviewers with experience of operating QAA processes at institutional level across the UK
  - senior staff and students from HEIs with independent experience of QAA processes
  - a Funding Council representative

### **Self-evaluation document**

6 The self-evaluation document submitted by QAA comprised an account of the following principal areas:

- Introduction to the work of QAA

- The higher education system in the United Kingdom
  - The structure and organisation of QAA
  - The history of QAA and evaluation in UK higher education
- Procedures used by QAA (amplified in Annexes comprising key procedural documents)
- A self-assessment by QAA (on a Standard by Standard basis) of its compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in higher education in regard to
  - ESG Part 2: European standards and guidelines for the external quality assurance of higher education
  - ESG Part 3: European standards and guidelines for external quality assurance agencies
- Views of key stakeholders

A summary of the additional documentation submitted is summarised at Appendix 2

## **The National Context**

### **UK Higher Education system**

8 The higher education system in the UK is complex and reflects the diversity of each of the administrative jurisdictions of the UK, namely England; Scotland; Wales; and Northern Ireland. There are over 160 autonomous universities and colleges of higher education in the UK, with marked differences in their histories, size and missions. In all there are about 2.4 million students in the UK, of whom about 12 per cent are from other countries. In all four countries of the UK, HEIs are independent, autonomous organisations, with their own legal identities and powers, both academic and managerial. They are not owned by the state, although most are dependent to a greater or lesser extent on state financing, and are free to offer such programmes and awards as they wish, subject to the status of their awarding powers, which are regulated by Government. Each university and college of higher education is responsible for ensuring that appropriate standards are being achieved and a good quality education is being offered. HEIs in the UK are therefore private institutions, but undertaking public functions. Separate funding councils exist for England, Scotland and Wales, and the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) funds higher education in Northern Ireland. Universities and colleges are also funded through student tuition fees. Under the terms of the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act, the funding councils have a statutory obligation to *'secure that provision is made for assessing the quality of education provided in institutions for whose activities they provide, or are considering providing, financial support...'*. This responsibility is discharged through annual contracts with QAA. In 2005-06, universities and colleges had a total income of £19.5 billion. Of this, £7.6 billion came from the UK higher education funding bodies, £0.4 billion from other government sources, and £11.5 billion from non-government sources such as private fees, industry and charities.

### **Background to the QAA**

9 The history of quality assurance in the UK is complex. The current structure derives from the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, a new legal framework which enacted a number of major changes to the way in which higher education in the UK was structured and funded. The legislation also impacted significantly on the ways in which quality assurance and assessment were subsequently organised across the higher education sector.

First, the Act abolished the existing 'binary' system within the UK and re-designated polytechnics as universities. Secondly and simultaneously, the three new UK funding councils created by the Act (which were responsible to Government for the funding of universities) were henceforth statutorily required to *'secure that provision is made for assessing the quality of education provided in institutions for whose activities they provide, or are considering providing, financial support'* .

To fulfil this requirement for quality assessment, subject-based inspections were introduced and carried out by all the funding councils (initially known as 'teaching quality assessments' (TQA), later 'subject reviews') and these underwent a number of modifications between 1993 and 2001 when the full first cycles were complete. The broader function of 'quality audit' continued as a sector-owned activity through the establishment of the Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC), which had the responsibility for auditing at an institutional (rather than subject) level, institutions' overall systems of management for their internal quality assurance processes and the overall effectiveness of those processes. From its inception, HEQC also took on an important quality enhancement role in addition to its audit function.

10 The national landscape changed again in 1996 with the setting up of a Joint Planning Group drawn from the funding councils and the institutions' representative bodies, which was asked to design a unified quality assurance system which would combine the two strands of audit and subject review. Although no feasible unified review method emerged, a model was developed for a single quality assurance agency which was established in April 1997 as QAA. QAA thus brought together in a single organisation the responsibility for all aspects of quality assessment and audit underpinned by a merger of staffing from the HEQC and from the quality assessment divisions of the English and Welsh Funding Councils (HEFCE and

HEFCW). The Scottish Funding Council subsequently agreed to contract its quality assurance activities to QAA.

11 The UK Government's response to the landmark national *'Dearing Report'* on higher education published in 1997 considerably expanded the potential duties of the new agency beyond the undertaking of assessments and audits, by proposing that it should 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, 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 thus consolidated and fully recognised.

12 Between 1997 and 2001 QAA continued operating both subject reviews and academic audits (now into their second, 'continuation audit' cycle) and developed most of the proposals from the *'Dearing Report'*. From 2001 the quality assurance arrangements for each UK country developed with different emphases and characteristics, leading to the emergence of the current suite of institutionally (rather than subject-level) focused reviews described variously in England/Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales as institutional audit, ELIR and institutional review respectively. In England, a new quality assurance approach was developed, grounded in the academic quality audit method used by QAA and its predecessors since 1991. In 2005 the current audit model was developed for England and adopted with the agreement of the institutions' representative bodies and HEFCE. The audit process facilitates exploration of a broad range of topics and themes, linked to an audit trail procedure to gather evidence and focus scrutiny. This model is currently in use on a six-year cycle. Scotland developed the 'Enhancement-led Institutional Review' (ELIR) procedure. Wales developed a scheme for institutional review and Northern Ireland followed England and adopted the modified institutional audit process. QAA however remained the organisation charged by the UK country governments with developing and undertaking all these activities.

Whilst the institutional review carried out by QAA takes a number of different detailed forms and names, the underlying principle for external quality assurance in the UK is that it should provide public confidence that the HEIs are exercising their responsibilities for the academic standards and quality of their programmes and awards in a way that safeguards the interests of students and society more generally. While each of the review types has a different emphasis, all have a similar fundamental function: to examine the internal quality assurance policies and processes and to assess and report publicly on the level of confidence that can be placed in them. Additionally, the opportunity is taken to recommend ways in which improvements might be made to the management of standards and quality.

13 Some UK institutions offer programmes in different countries through links with other organisations or on a collaborative basis with other education providers in the UK. QAA reviews these partnerships to ensure that the quality and standards offered to students in the home institution are equally evident in the programmes offered jointly with the partner organisation. QAA has continued to audit both collaborative provision in England, Northern Ireland and Wales and international activity across the UK through its programme of overseas audits.

### **Shape of Higher Education provision and the Academic Infrastructure**

14 Although higher education institutions in the UK have a very high level of academic autonomy, their programme structures function in similar ways and use a broadly common academic structure. This is a three-cycle framework, which conforms to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) qualifications framework. Bachelors' degrees are of three or four years' duration for full-time students (three being more common in England, Wales and Northern Ireland for subjects other than modern languages and 'sandwich' courses that contain a work experience year). Masters' degrees typically last for between one and two years. Doctoral programmes typically last for three years.

National higher education qualifications frameworks (one for England, Wales and Northern Ireland (EWNl) and one for Scotland) have been in use since 2001.

The Scottish framework was successfully self-certified against the Qualifications Framework of the EHEA in 2007 and the EWN framework is undergoing the self-certification procedure during 2008. All parts of the UK use credit systems: while these differ in detail they are compatible with one another and with the European credit transfer and accumulation system (ECTS).

15 The QAA's Academic Infrastructure provides a basic way of describing the organisation of higher education qualifications and academic standards in UK higher education. It evolved from recommendations about quality and standards made in the reports of *The National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education and its Scottish Committee* ('Dearing' and 'Garrick' reports) in 1997. Those reports had identified confusion relating to the meaning of different higher education awards, the diversity of programmes with the same or similar names, and the need for useful information about the way that local autonomy could co-exist with national expectations about standards and quality. The Academic Infrastructure comprises the following four elements developed by QAA, working with the higher education sector. It encourages diversity and innovation within academic programmes.

- A Code of Practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education.
- The frameworks for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and in Scotland.
- Subject benchmark statements, which set out expectations about standards of degrees in a range of subject areas. They describe what gives a discipline its coherence and identity, and define what can be expected of a graduate in terms of the abilities and skills needed to develop understanding or competence in the subject.
- Programme specifications, consisting of definitive publicly available information on the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievements of programmes of study.

Although the Academic Infrastructure has no legal standing and is not mandatory, there is a clear expectation that HEIs will take the elements fully into account in their management of the standards and quality of their programmes and awards. QAA judges the extent to which they meet this expectation.

#### **Other QAA activities**

16 Although not formally within the scope of this Review, the Panel noted the following other activities undertaken by QAA:

- Lead responsibility for a UK-wide process which delivers recommendations to Government on the granting of degree awarding powers and the granting of university title.
- Through QAA's Access Recognition and Licensing Committee, the licensing in England, Wales and NI of access validating agencies (AVAs) to enable those agencies to recognise Access to Higher Education programmes, and to award Access to Higher Education certificates and diplomas to students.
- Quality enhancement work, such as maintenance of the Academic Infrastructure; highlighting themes, questions, good practice and recommendations; disseminating the information gained through its activities; and running enhancement theme projects (Scotland). This includes providing collective and sector-wide intelligence obtained from reviews and audits, institutional liaison and other developmental work within the sector. Thematic briefings are provided in publication series such as *Quality Matters*, *Outcomes from Institutional Audit*, *Outcomes from Collaborative Provision Audit*, and *Enhancement Themes papers*. Good practice is shared through a series of good practice papers and sector-wide overview reports. Reports so far have focused on AVA review, continuation audit, developmental engagements, Foundation Degrees, higher education in further education colleges, and subject review.
- Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (England), whereby QAA undertakes reviews of higher education provision delivered in further education colleges in England on behalf of HEFCE.

## **QAA Compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area**

(The numbering system applied below to each standard of the ESG is that used in ENQA's 1995 report to ministers in Bergen)

### **2.4 Part 2: European standards and guidelines for the external quality assurance of higher education**

#### **2.4.1 Use of internal quality assurance procedures**

**Standard:**

External quality assurance procedures should take into account the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines.

**Guidelines:**

The standards for internal quality assurance contained in Part 1 provide a valuable basis for the external quality assessment process. It is important that the institutions' own internal policies and procedures are carefully evaluated in the course of external procedures, to determine the extent to which the standards are being met.

If higher education institutions are to be able to demonstrate the effectiveness of their own internal quality assurance processes, and if those processes properly assure quality and standards, then external processes might be less intensive than otherwise.

#### **QAA compliance**

17 The Panel has confirmed that the starting point for the QAA review process is based firmly on the institutions' self-evaluations of their own processes. The Panel has examined and explored QAA's institutional review processes as set out in its country specific audit/review handbooks (see Appendix 2) in operation and confirms from individual examples which the Panel has explored, that these are effective in testing and challenging institutions' internal quality assurance policies and their procedures for managing quality and standards.

The reference points used by QAA in assessing self-evaluations are contained in the elements of the Academic Infrastructure, which itself is compatible with section 1 of the ESG.

**Panel judgement:**

Fully compliant

#### **2.4.2 Development of external quality assurance processes**

##### **Standard:**

The aims and objectives of quality assurance processes should be determined before the processes themselves are developed, by all those responsible (including higher education institutions) and should be published with a description of the procedures to be used.

##### **Guidelines:**

In order to ensure clarity of purpose and transparency of procedures, external quality assurance methods should be designed and developed through a process involving key stakeholders, including higher education institutions. The procedures that are finally agreed should be published and should contain explicit statements of the aims and objectives of the processes as well as a description of the procedures to be used.

As external quality assurance makes demands on the institutions involved, a preliminary impact assessment should be undertaken to ensure that the procedures to be adopted are appropriate and do not interfere more than necessary with the normal work of higher education institutions.

#### **QAA compliance**

18 In developing its institutional review processes, QAA first discusses the purposes of the reviews with key stakeholders and, when consensus is reached, produces a draft operational description. This is consulted upon with all stakeholders, including all institutions, and a handbook, containing the details of the processes, is published in advance of any reviews taking place. As an example, the Panel has reviewed in detail the recent development of a revised process for Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) in Scotland and believes this to be an outstanding exemplar of a dynamic process which has fully engaged with stakeholders, but which at the same time has preserved the integrity and independence of the process.

19 The Panel noted that QAA is a signatory to the concordat of the Higher Education Regulation Review Group (HERRG), an English sector-wide agreement that aims to reduce any unnecessary burden of external regulation on institutions, thus ensuring that demands placed on them are reasonable and appropriate to the level of assurance required. In Scotland, QAA is a member of the Higher Education Quality Working Group (HEQWG) which performs a broadly similar function.

QAA also carries out and publishes regulatory impact assessments for its review procedures.

#### **Panel judgement:**

Fully compliant

### **2.4.3 Criteria for decisions**

**Standard:**

Any formal decisions made as a result of an external quality assurance activity should be based on explicit published criteria that are applied consistently.

**Guidelines:**

Formal decisions made by quality assurance agencies have a significant impact on the institutions and programmes that are judged. In the interests of equity and reliability, decisions should be based on published criteria and interpreted in a consistent manner. Conclusions should be based on recorded evidence and agencies should have in place ways of moderating conclusions, if necessary.

### **QAA compliance**

20 QAA's criteria for its decision-making procedures are all widely published in its handbooks and in other operational documents. The Panel found these to be clearly and unambiguously expressed, explicit and consistent overall. The criteria themselves are based on the Academic Infrastructure and the Code of Practice and are well-founded.

21 The peer review teams are well trained for their role through a rigorous and continuing training process. Overall management of the teams is in the hands of trained and professional assistant directors, who ensure that the judgements of the teams are defensible in terms of the evidence available to support them, and who are also responsible for exercising editorial control over the drafting of reports by the team members. All report drafts are required to include references to the sources of the supporting evidence for analyses and judgements. In essence, QAA adopts the policy of entrusting the judgements to the team members, while testing them and retaining control over the form of the reports.

**Panel judgement:**

Fully compliant

#### **2.4.4 Processes fit for purpose**

##### **Standard:**

All external quality assurance processes should be designed specifically to ensure their fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for them.

##### **Guidelines:**

Quality assurance agencies within the EHEA undertake different external processes for different purposes and in different ways. It is of the first importance that agencies should operate procedures which are fit for their own defined and published purposes. Experience has shown, however, that there are some widely-used elements of external review processes which not only help to ensure their validity, reliability and usefulness, but also provide a basis for the European dimension to quality assurance.

Amongst these elements the following are particularly noteworthy:

- insistence that the experts undertaking the external quality assurance activity have appropriate skills and are competent to perform their task
- the exercise of care in the selection of experts
- the provision of appropriate briefing or training for experts
- the use of international experts
- participation of students
- ensuring that the review procedures used are sufficient to provide adequate evidence to support the findings and conclusions reached
- the use of the self-evaluation/site visit/draft report/published report/follow-up model of review
- recognition of the importance of institutional improvement and enhancement policies as a fundamental element in the assurance of quality.

#### **QAA compliance**

22 The Panel has examined the key elements of the processes operated by QAA.

The Panel was told and accepts that QAA bases its processes on the 'fitness for purpose' principle. As a result it uses different procedures for the various review processes that it undertakes. While each of the review types has a different emphasis, the Panel accepts that all have a fundamental function: to examine the institutions' internal quality assurance policies and processes and to assess and report publicly on the level of confidence that can be placed in them. Additionally, the opportunity is taken to recommend ways in which improvements might be made to the management of standards and quality.

23 The Panel was impressed by procedures for the careful selection of reviewers against published criteria, and the quality of training given to them, usually through a three-day programme in advance of their first review, backed up by twice-yearly meetings. These provide opportunities for reviewers to learn of new developments, report on their reviewing experience, and share ideas with other reviewers and QAA staff. Although reviewers are nominated by institutions, they are selected by the QAA in an extensive, criterion-based process, in which nominees are matched against the criteria. Account is taken of the need for gender, geographical and professional balances. The equality policy operated for the recruitment of reviewers states that no discrimination must occur on the grounds of race, colour, creed, ethnic or national origins, nationality, disability, age, sex, sexual orientation, marital status or family responsibility among the reviewer cohort.

24 The Panel has noted the different speeds in operation within the QAA's country structure in relation to the inclusion of student and international experts as reviewers. In Scotland students are already included in review teams as full members and the Panel heard that there

are plans to extend this to other parts of the UK. As of January 2008 English institutional audit teams include a student observer, and it is expected that this role will be upgraded to full membership by the time the next audit cycle starts in 2011, if not sooner.

25 Similarly, QAA does not have a tradition of using international experts, largely because of perceived concerns about the scale of the review programme and the high level of detailed knowledge and understanding of the UK's higher education systems and their management arrangements needed to be an effective reviewer. The Panel heard that this position will probably change in the coming year, when revisions to the Scottish ELIR system will include an international expert in review teams. If this proves successful, it will probably be adopted elsewhere in the UK. The Panel notes that the inclusion of international experts in review activity is fully within the spirit of the European Standards and Guidelines and would urge QAA to move towards implementation as soon as practicable.

26 At present students (in the audit systems in use in England, Wales and NI) are invited to submit a written submission to be examined by the review team and would normally have input in the preparation of the institutional self assessment. They are fully involved in the ELIR process in use in Scotland. The team also meets privately with student union officers during the site visit. QAA has a student strategy wider than inclusion of students in audit teams and devotes effort to supporting student involvement with quality-related activities within their institutions.

27 Site visits typically last four days. All QAA's review processes use the 'four stage' model of self-evaluation/site visit/published report/follow-up; from the examples it has seen, the Panel believes that this system is operating very effectively.

28 The Panel noted that all QAA review methods place an increasing importance on enhancement as a key aspect of managing quality. Quality enhancement work includes maintenance of the Academic Infrastructure; highlighting themes, questions, good practice and recommendations; and disseminating the information gained through QAA's activities. This includes providing collective and sector-wide intelligence obtained from reviews and audits, institutional liaison and other developmental work within the sector. Thematic briefings are provided in publication series such as *Quality Matters*, *Outcomes from Institutional Audit*, *Outcomes from Collaborative Provision Audit*, and *Enhancement Themes papers*. Good practice is shared through a series of good practice papers and sector-wide overview reports. Reports so far have focused on AVA review, continuation audit, developmental engagements, Foundation Degrees, higher education in further education colleges, and subject review.

**Panel judgement:**

Fully compliant

#### **2.4.5 Reporting**

##### **Standard:**

Reports should be published and should be written in a style which is clear and readily accessible to its intended readership. Any decisions, commendations or recommendations contained in reports should be easy for a reader to find.

##### **Guidelines:**

In order to ensure maximum benefit from external quality assurance processes, it is important that reports should meet the identified needs of the intended readership.

Reports are sometimes intended for different readership groups and this will require careful attention to structure, content, style and tone.

In general, reports should be structured to cover description, analysis (including relevant evidence), conclusions, commendations, and recommendations.

There should be sufficient preliminary explanation to enable a lay reader to understand the purposes of the review, its form, and the criteria used in making decisions. Key findings, conclusions and recommendations should be easily locatable by readers. Reports should be published in a readily accessible form and there should be opportunities for readers and users of the reports (both within the relevant institution and outside it) to comment on their usefulness.

#### **QAA compliance**

29 QAA publishes its review reports both in hard copy and on its website.

Reports include a judgement on the degree of confidence QAA has in the standards and quality of the institution and/or programme and provide commendations and recommendations on the practices of the institution. Decisions, commendations and recommendations contained in reports are, in general easily accessible to readers.

30 The Panel was informed that many different attempts have been made over the years to ensure that the style and content of the reports meet the needs of the various audiences for which they are intended. The recently introduced reports for institutional audit in England and Northern Ireland are trying to improve the usability of reports by dividing them into two parts: a concise report for a general audience, containing the judgement of confidence, recommendations and commendations; and a longer 'technical annex' containing the detailed descriptions and analyses of institutional quality assurance systems aimed at a more specialist audience. The technical annex is published only on the website. Similarly in Scotland, in recognition of the different needs and interests of these audience groups, there will be two forms of reporting on ELIR outcomes for individual institutions in the next round of reviews which will commence later this year: the main report and a summary report with the latter specifically aimed at a wider, less specialist audience. Both reports will be published on the QAA website; the summary report will also be available in print format.

31 QAA also publishes guides that help stakeholders to make best use of the reports, for example the QAA/UCAS student guide and the guide for international students. International guides are translated and available in a selection of languages. Reports on Welsh institutions are also available in Welsh, in accordance with QAA's Welsh Language Scheme.

32 The Panel believes that the current forms of reporting are meeting the public information requirement. However, there is a pervasive impression gained by the Panel both from the documentation which it has seen and from interviewees that the language used in formulating QAA judgements about individual institutions relied heavily on terms more readily familiar to a specialist audience and may therefore sometimes require some further interpretation for the non-specialist. The Panel understands the requirement to maintain consistency of approach in reporting styles across the sector, but would endorse QAA's continuing review of its reporting style so as to deliver increased acuity of expression.

#### **Panel judgement:**

Fully compliant

#### **2.4.6 Follow up-procedures**

**Standard:**

Quality assurance processes which contain recommendations for action or which require a subsequent action plan, should have a predetermined follow-up procedure which is implemented consistently.

**Guidelines:**

Quality assurance is not principally about individual external scrutiny events: it should be about continuously trying to do a better job. External quality assurance does not end with the publication of the report and should include a structured follow-up procedure to ensure that recommendations are dealt with appropriately and any required action plans drawn up and implemented. This may involve further meetings with institutional or programme representatives. The objective is to ensure that areas identified for improvement are dealt with speedily and that further enhancement is encouraged.

#### **QAA compliance**

33 QAA reviews have always included some form of follow-up. In Wales and Scotland a 'one-year-after' enquiry system operates, determining the action taken in response to recommendations. In addition, in Scotland, in cases where significant problems have been identified, there is a requirement on the institution to submit an action plan within a specified time which must be approved, monitored and then signed off. In both the current English and Welsh methods a desk-based check (with some slight differences) takes place half-way between audits, where institutions are requested to provide information, including copies of internal review reports, demonstrating progress since the last audit. In the current Scottish method, this procedure forms part of an annual discussion with institutions.

34 Institutions that receive a 'no confidence' or 'limited confidence' judgement in their audits are required to produce an action plan, which is monitored by QAA. The audit is not signed off until the institution can demonstrate that the action plan has been implemented satisfactorily. A maximum 18-month period is allowed for the implementation process.

35 The Panel has tracked two examples of actions taken following judgements of 'limited confidence/no confidence' and is fully confident that QAA's follow-up procedures are robust and operating effectively.

**Panel judgement:**

Fully compliant

#### **2.4.7 Periodic reviews**

##### **Standard:**

External quality assurance of institutions and/or programmes should be undertaken on a cyclical basis. The length of the cycle and the review procedures to be used should be clearly defined and published in advance.

##### **Guidelines:**

Quality assurance is not a static but a dynamic process. It should be continuous and not 'once in a lifetime'. It does not end with the first review or with the completion of the formal follow-up procedure. It has to be periodically renewed. Subsequent external reviews should take into account progress that has been made since the previous event. The process to be used in all external reviews should be clearly defined by the external quality assurance agency and its demands on institutions should not be greater than are necessary for the achievement of its objectives.

#### **QAA compliance**

36 QAA currently operates its institutional audit process in England and Northern Ireland and its institutional review process in Wales over a six-year period. In Scotland, ELIR runs on a four-yearly cycle at present. The cycles are agreed with institutions' representative bodies and Funding Councils and are published. The institutions' position in the cycle is communicated to them at the start of the cycle.

37 The differing cycle lengths in the Audit and Review processes throughout the UK are largely a result of historical circumstances relating to the development of the UK's quality assurance processes. In England and Northern Ireland, the length of the review cycle was initially determined by the length of time required to audit all the institutions in the sector. It was later agreed, (2002) following a Ministerial statement, to complete a full set of institutional audits within a three-year period, and to then move to a six-year cycle. In Scotland a four-year cycle was identified as the minimum period of time within which the reviews of all the Scottish institutions could be completed. Wales has a six-year review cycle that is slightly out of step with the English cycle and a new cycle will be established for Wales in 2009-10.

38 These variations in cycle length reflect the different conditions within the UK, and are sensitive to the varying needs of the sector across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. The Panel investigated the mismatch between country timetables for quality assurance engagements and does not believe that these either compromise quality assurance or create significant practical problems. With a European move to greater institutional ownership of quality and standards, the frequency of external inspection becomes a less critical factor. This is also consistent with QAA's commitment to the HERRG concordat, which is designed to ensure that demands on institutions are appropriate both to the level of assurance required and the achievement of objectives. However, the Panel would urge QAA to be vigilant in ensuring that the implementation of any significant change in QAA methodology, or in approaches to QA arrangements deemed nationally desirable, are not held back through the mismatch in cycle length.

#### **Panel judgement:**

Fully compliant

#### **2.4.8 System-wide analysis**

**Standard:**

Quality assurance agencies should produce from time to time summary reports describing and analysing the general findings of their reviews, evaluations, assessments, etc.

**Guidelines:**

All external quality assurance agencies collect a wealth of information about individual programmes and/or institutions and this provides material for structured analyses across whole higher education systems. Such analyses can provide very useful information about developments, trends, emerging good practice and areas of persistent difficulty or weakness and can become useful tools for policy development and quality enhancement. Agencies should consider including a research and development function within their activities, to help them extract maximum benefit from their work.

#### **QAA compliance**

39 QAA produces a large number of analytical reports relating to the generic, sector-wide aspects of its reviews. These are published both in hard copy and on its website. The most significant recent developments in this work have been of a series of publications analysing aspects of the findings of institutional audit reports in England and Northern Ireland, entitled '*Outcomes from...*' An '*Outcomes*' document for Wales is also to be published. QAA also produces more general '*Learning from...*' analyses. In Scotland, a '*Learning from ELIR*' series is published. The outcomes from ELIR are also used to inform the work of the Enhancement Themes initiative and other general enhancement activities. The Enhancement Themes initiative aims to enrich the student learning experience in Scottish higher education by identifying specific areas (Themes) for development. The Themes encourage academic and support staff and students to share current good practice and collectively generate ideas and models for innovation in learning and teaching. The Themes are part of the Quality Enhancement Framework, and have led to many outputs, including a range of publications. QAA also publishes '*Quality Matters*', an occasional series of exploratory essays relating to aspects of quality assurance.

40 Most of QAA's research and analysis is undertaken by its Development and Enhancement Group and by QAA Scotland. Statistical analyses are undertaken by the Information Unit, based in the Reviews Group. QAA also publishes reports and notes on a number of quality assurance matters, and organises sector-wide events to discuss external review practices.

41 The Panel has been impressed by the quantity and quality of analyses and widely-disseminated reports produced by QAA and by the significant resource which they represent for the sector in supporting quality enhancement.

**Panel judgement:**

Fully compliant

## 2.6 Part 3: European standards and guidelines for external quality assurance agencies

### QAA compliance

#### 2.6.1 Use of external quality assurance procedures for higher education

**Standard:**

The external quality assurance of agencies should take into account the presence and effectiveness of the external quality assurance processes described in Part 2 of the European Standards and Guidelines.

**Guidelines:**

The standards for external quality assurance contained in Part 2 provide a valuable basis for the external quality assessment process. The standards reflect best practices and experiences gained through the development of external quality assurance in Europe since the early 1990s. It is therefore important that these standards are integrated into the processes applied by external quality assurance agencies towards the higher education institutions. The standards for external quality assurance should together with the standards for external quality assurance agencies constitute the basis for professional and credible external quality assurance of higher education institutions.

42 The Panel confirms that, as described in the previous section, QAA's processes and procedures are based on, and are compliant with, Part 2 of the ESG.

**Panel judgement:**

Fully compliant

### **2.6.2 Official status**

#### **Standard:**

Agencies should be formally recognised by competent public authorities in the European Higher Education Area as agencies with responsibilities for external quality assurance and should have an established legal basis. They should comply with any requirements of the legislative jurisdictions within which they operate.

#### **QAA compliance**

43 The UK's higher education funding councils contract with QAA to provide assessments of the education in the institutions they fund, in discharge of their statutory obligations required by UK Governments under the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act. The Governments also commission QAA to advise them on applications for the granting of degree-awarding powers and university title.

44 QAA's formal status is that of a company limited by guarantee and a charity registered in England and separately in Scotland. It depends for its income on subscriptions from HEIs and the renewal of annual contracts with its principal stakeholders. The members of the company are UUK, Universities Scotland, HEW, and GuildHE. QAA operates according to national and country-specific UK law, as appropriate. QAA's Memorandum of Association states its objectives as follows:

- the promotion and maintenance of quality and standards in higher education in the UK and elsewhere
- the enhancement of teaching and learning, and the identification and promotion of innovation and good practice in teaching and learning
- the provision of information and the publication of reports on quality and standards in higher education in the UK and elsewhere
- the provision of advice to governments, as requested, on access course recognition and in relation to all or any of the above objects.

45. The Panel fully accepts that QAA is recognised by the UK central and devolved Governments as the national agency with prime responsibility for external quality assurance in higher education and thus meets the ENQA standard. However, QAA's position is not technically underpinned by force of Parliamentary statute and potential issues arising both from this and from its funding structure are discussed further in paragraph 57 below. Nevertheless the current governance structure embracing QAA accurately reflects the responsibilities of central Government for securing quality and standards in the educational provision it funds; it brokers effective linkage to HEIs as autonomous self governing institutions; and it facilitates their involvement in a national scheme of quality assurance and the process of continuous quality enhancement based on evaluation by peers.

#### **Panel judgement:**

Fully compliant

### **2.6.3 Activities**

**Standard:**

Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities (at institutional or programme level) on a regular basis.

**Guidelines:**

These may involve evaluation, review, audit, assessment, accreditation or other similar activities and should be part of the core functions of the agency.

**QAA compliance**

46 As previously noted, QAA currently makes judgements based on institutional audits over a six-year period in England and Northern Ireland, ELIR on a four-year cycle in Scotland and institutional review on a six-year cycle in Wales. It also undertakes reviews of publicly-funded higher education in further education colleges on a regular basis. Reports of all the reviews conducted by QAA since 2002 are available on QAA's website.

**Panel judgement:**

Fully compliant

#### **2.6.4 Resources**

**Standard:**

Agencies should have adequate and proportionate resources, both human and financial, to enable them to organise and run their external quality assurance process (es) in an effective and efficient manner, with appropriate provision for the development of their processes and procedures.

#### **QAA compliance**

47 QAA's head office is in Gloucester, England, with a second office in Glasgow responsible for all activities in Scotland. QAA also uses a small office in London to support the activities of its staff, auditors, and reviewers. QAA employs 130 staff and contracts from a pool of more than 500 trained auditors and reviewers. QAA employs appropriate human resources to satisfy its Welsh Language Scheme obligation to treat the English and Welsh languages equally in its operations in Wales.

48 In 2006-07 QAA's total income was over £10 million (approximately €12.5m). It has reserves amounting to approximately £3 million (approximately €3.7m). QAA is jointly funded from subscriptions from HEIs (c.37.5% in 2006/7) and contracts with the higher education funding councils (c. 46% in 2006/7). Additional income is generated through self-funding activities and contracts.

49 Since the cessation of subject reviews in 2001, subscription bands for HEIs have been frozen and no inflationary increases subsequently applied. The current funding model implies that the funding councils will provide a growing proportion of the QAA's income and that their role in supporting new developments will become increasingly important. The Panel concurs in the view that QAA has appropriate and proportionate resources to support all its current operations. The Panel would however urge the partners funding QAA to assure themselves that they are making adequate financial contributions to represent their interest in its operation and to encourage the inclusion of both students and international experts in future review activities, and to further emphasize (and invest in) enhancement and development, as set out in QAA's strategic plan.

#### **Panel judgement:**

Fully compliant

### **2.6.5 Mission statement**

**Standard:**

Agencies should have clear and explicit goals and objectives for their work, contained in a publicly available statement.

**Guidelines:**

These statements should describe the goals and objectives of agencies' quality assurance processes, the division of labour with relevant stakeholders in higher education, especially the higher education institutions, and the cultural and historical context of their work. The statements should make clear that the external quality assurance process is a major activity of the agency and that there exists a systematic approach to achieving its goals and objectives. There should also be documentation to demonstrate how the statements are translated into a clear policy and management plan.

### **QAA compliance**

50 QAA's stated mission is to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of higher education qualifications and to inform and encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of higher education. QAA's explicit goals are outlined below and are further defined in the Memorandum of Association that is publicly available on QAA's website. To achieve its mission, QAA works in partnership with the providers and funders of higher education, staff and students in higher education, employers and other stakeholders, to:

- safeguard the student and wider public interest in the maintenance of standards of academic awards and the quality of higher education
- communicate information on academic standards and quality to inform student choice and employers' understanding, and to underpin public policy-making
- enhance the assurance and management of standards and quality in higher education
- promote wider understanding of the nature of standards and quality in higher education, including the maintenance of common reference points, drawing on UK, other European and international practice.

51 To translate these statements into a clear policy and management plan, QAA uses strategic plans to set the main goals and objectives over a set period of time. Currently QAA is operating under the 2006-11 strategic plan. In turn, the strategic plan is used as the basis for a published annual operating plan. The annual operating plan summarises the group operating plans which contain the detailed work plans for each group for the year. Each year, an annual review is also published describing the achievements of the previous year's work.

52 The Panel confirms that QAA has clear and explicit goals and objectives for its work, which are appropriately differentiated.

**Panel judgement:**

Fully compliant

### **2.6.6 Independence**

#### **Standard:**

Agencies should be independent to the extent both that they have autonomous responsibility for their operations and that the conclusions and recommendations made in their reports cannot be influenced by third parties such as higher education institutions, ministries or other stakeholders.

#### **Guidelines:**

An agency will need to demonstrate its independence through measures, such as:

- its operational independence from higher education institutions and governments is guaranteed in official documentation (e.g. instruments of governance or legislative acts)
- the definition and operation of its procedures and methods, the nomination and appointment of external experts and the determination of the outcomes of its quality assurance processes are undertaken autonomously and independently from governments, higher education institutions, and organs of political influence
- while relevant stakeholders in higher education, particularly students/learners, are consulted in the course of quality assurance processes, the final outcomes of the quality assurance processes remain the responsibility of the agency.

### **QAA compliance**

53 QAA is an independent body, established as a company limited by guarantee and having charitable status. It has no formal links to Government or to individual HEIs.

54 The Panel was able to determine that QAA acts entirely independently in making its judgements. All reports, decisions, judgements, recommendations and commendations are those of QAA and its contracted peer reviewers.

55 The Board is structured so as to safeguard the independence of QAA. Four members of the Board are appointed by the institutional representative bodies, four are appointed by the funding councils, and seven (of whom one is a student and one must be the Chairman) are independent members appointed by the Board itself. The independent members are chosen so as to be broadly representative of employers of graduates. Two observers, representing the interests of government education departments, and the Higher Education Academy, may attend Board meetings, but may not vote.

56 The Panel has confirmed that the procedures and methods operated by QAA are determined by the Board in the light of consultations with stakeholders. Although the pool of nominations is made through institutions, the final decision on the appointment of external experts and the determination of the outcomes of its quality assurance processes are undertaken entirely within QAA, according to the published procedures. The Panel welcomed in particular the leadership shown by the QAA Board in promoting, across the sector, the inclusion of student and international reviewers/auditors in future audit and review arrangements across the UK. The panel also welcomes the initiative being shown by QAA in beginning to address the challenges for quality and standards implicit in the Government's current drive for a significant increase in employer-based education in the sector.

57 The Panel accepts that the QAA and its Board are structured in such a way as to secure operational independence from HEIs and Government in its day-to-day operations. Nevertheless the current funding model for QAA, which is based on annual subscriptions from HE institutions and on a system of annual contracts from the funding councils potentially introduces an element of uncertainty into the underlying stability of QAA relating to 'autonomous responsibility for their operations'. Similarly the requirement for endorsement by

the Funding Councils both of QAA's annual programme of work and of the principal elements of any revisions to the review methodologies could also contribute to this potential uncertainty. The Panel believes that the funders could, with benefit, review these arrangements to introduce and document formally a longer operational and financial horizon.

In reality the Panel does not believe that in the foreseeable future this will act as a major constraint on QAA and its activities, but the Panel advises the development of a more detailed protocol articulating the relationship between QAA and the funding councils and their respective Boards, set within a longer planning horizon than at present in order that full public confidence in the independence of QAA should be retained, in compliance with the spirit of the ENQA standard.

**Panel judgement:**

Substantially compliant

### **2.6.7 External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the agencies**

#### **Standard:**

The processes, criteria and procedures used by agencies should be pre-defined and publicly available. These processes will normally be expected to include:

- a self-assessment or equivalent procedure by the subject of the quality assurance process
- an external assessment by a group of experts, including, as appropriate, student member(s), and site visits as decided by the agency
- publication of a report, including any decisions, recommendations or other formal outcomes
- a follow-up procedure to review actions taken by the subject of the quality assurance process in the light of any recommendations contained in the report.

#### **Guidelines:**

Agencies may develop and use other processes and procedures for particular purposes. Agencies should pay careful attention to their declared principles at all times, and ensure both that their requirements and processes are managed professionally and that their conclusions and decisions are reached in a consistent manner, even though the decisions are formed by groups of different people.

Agencies that make formal quality assurance decisions, or conclusions which have formal consequences, should have an appeals procedure. The nature and form of the appeals procedure should be determined in the light of the constitution of each agency.

#### **QAA compliance**

58 All QAA review processes include self-evaluation; external assessments and site visits by a group of experts; publication of a report; and a follow-up procedure to review actions taken following the recommendations made. Detailed information regarding these processes is publicly available. Each individual review is evaluated through questionnaires sent to reviewers, students, and the institution.

59 QAA distinguishes between complaints and appeals. A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with services provided by QAA or actions taken by it. Complaints are handled through the published *Complaints from Institutions: Procedures*. Appeals are challenges to specific decisions, in specific circumstances, and are handled through the published *Institutional audit and review: Procedures on representations*. The representation procedures are available to an institution where a team has judged that it has no confidence in the soundness of the institution's procedures for the present and likely future management of the quality of its programmes and the academic standards of its awards. This is the only circumstance in which a representation may be made against a team's judgements. The Panel has explored QAA's appeals and representation procedures via a number of actual examples and believes the procedures are operating in a satisfactory manner, although it could find no strong justification for barring representations following a judgement of limited confidence.

60 The Panel has noted that QAA is not yet fully compliant with the expectations of the Standard relating to inclusion of a student member on external assessments. Whilst this procedure has for some time proved successful in Scotland, it has not yet been fully introduced in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The Panel believes this development to be an entirely appropriate aspect of good practice. The Panel suggests that delaying the introduction of such aspects of good practice until the beginning of a new review cycle might unduly hinder the evolution of QAA and should be avoided, unless consistency of judgement about institutions is likely to be substantially compromised.

#### **Panel judgement:**

Substantially compliant

### **2.6.8 Accountability procedures**

#### **Standard:**

Agencies should have in place procedures for their own accountability.

#### **Guidelines:**

These procedures are expected to include the following:

- 1 A published policy for the assurance of the quality of the agency itself, made available on its website.
- 2 Documentation which demonstrates that:
  - the agency's processes and results reflect its mission and goals of quality assurance
  - the agency has in place, and enforces, a no-conflict-of-interest mechanism in the work of its external experts
  - the agency has reliable mechanisms that ensure the quality of any activities and material produced by subcontractors, if some or all of the elements in its quality assurance procedure are subcontracted to other parties
  - the agency has in place internal quality assurance procedures which include an internal feedback mechanism (i.e. means to collect feedback from its own staff and council/Board); an internal reflection mechanism (i.e. means to react to internal and external recommendations for improvement); and an external feedback mechanism (i.e. means to collect feedback from experts and reviewed institutions for future development) in order to inform and underpin its own development and improvement.
- 3 A mandatory cyclical external review of the agency's activities at least once every five years.

### **QAA compliance**

61 The Panel has established that QAA has or is developing clear procedures at Group, Executive and Board levels for planning and monitoring its own performance. Key processes include:

- preparation and monitoring of an Annual Operating Plan, supported by Group Local Operating Plans
- adoption by QAA's Board in March 2008, of a revised framework for measuring and assessing QAA's effectiveness, focusing on the three key areas of: QAA's performance, QAA's success and QAA's impact. The methodology includes 'traffic light' indicators
- an evaluation policy, underpinning an open and reflective evaluation, monitoring and review structure for all QAA activity across the sector.

62 The complex stakeholder context within which QAA operates makes necessary a similarly complex accountability system. The Panel confirms that QAA delivers substantial accountability to key stakeholders through a variety of mechanisms. These include to date regular reports to the following:

- the members of the company (UUK, Universities Scotland, HEW, GuildHE)
- the higher education Funding Councils
- the Charity Commission (England and Wales)
- The Office of the Scottish Charities Regulator
- Companies House
- HERRG (England)
- HEQWG (Scotland)
- QAFRG (England and Northern Ireland)
- the HEFCE Teaching and Learning Committee (England)
- the HEFCW Learning and Teaching Committee (Wales)
- the Scottish Credit Qualifications Partners Group

- its subscribing institutions.

63 As a limited company with charitable status, QAA is subject to UK companies law; English charities law; and Scottish charities law. In addition, QAA is reviewed annually by its external auditors and is subject to a series of studies of aspects of its work by its appointed independent internal auditors.

64 QAA operates a number of internal policies which support internal quality assurance, for example: data protection policy; electronic communications policy; equal opportunities policy; evaluation policy; human resources policies; information management policy; information security policy; media relations policy; publishing policy; records management policy; risk management policy; and treasury management policy. All policies are available on the web in line with QAA's voluntary publication scheme for Freedom of Information, which aims to make as much information publicly available as possible.

65 QAA publishes an annual report with details of its activities to ensure that its processes and results reflect its mission and goals. In addition, QAA publishes the reports sent to the funding councils documenting the fulfilment of its obligations under contract.

66 The appointment and recruitment procedures for QAA reviewers and auditors ensure there are no conflicts of interest, and reviewers/auditors may not for example review or audit their own institutions. Assistant Directors work closely with auditors and reviewers to ensure that all work produced externally by subcontractors is of an acceptable standard and fit for purpose.

67 QAA employs a number of mechanisms for internal and external feedback. These include: an annual staff survey to monitor the satisfaction of employees; monthly staff briefings led by the Chief Executive; regular 'Chats with the Chief' to encourage staff to discuss views and opinions with the Chief Executive; a 'Smarter thinking: better working' scheme to encourage staff to suggest ways of improving QAA's performance and efficiency; regular surveys of external stakeholders' views, the last survey having been conducted in September 2006; external evaluations of QAA processes, e.g. in Scotland, the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) has commissioned a longitudinal survey of stakeholder views of QAA (and related) processes from an independent evaluation team.

68 It was not evident to the Panel that there had been wide consultation within QAA in the drafting of the self-evaluation prepared for this review. QAA must undergo a mandatory cyclical external review of its activities at least once every five years in order to confirm continued membership of ENQA. In view of the breadth of its activity, it is for consideration by QAA whether it would wish at the appropriate time in the future to seek a Type B evaluation, more fully involving its staff and stakeholders in reflecting on the Agency's performance and opportunities for enhancement.

69 The Panel has been provided with considerable evidence relating to the wide-ranging mechanisms in place to underpin QAA's accountability. Implementation over the next few months of the revised framework for performance review and monitoring recently approved by QAA's Board should, in the Panel's view, secure the fullest compliance with this Standard and further enhance the capacity of the Board of QAA to maintain a challenging oversight of the strategic direction of QAA.

**Panel judgement:**

Fully compliant

## **Overall Conclusion**

70 QAA's overall performance against the standards of the ESG is very high. Where the Panel has made detailed comments on particular aspects of its work, these are designed to deliver further incremental improvement to an already strong organisation. QAA is fit for purpose, 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 in maintaining quality and standards across HE in the UK.

## APPENDIX 1

### Itinerary for site visit, Monday 21 April to Wednesday 23 April

Sunday 20 April		Event
Time		
From 14.30 onwards		Panel arrives at The Greenway Hotel
19.00		Panel meets for dinner in the Austen Room, followed by discussion
After dinner		Panel discussion in the Austen Room

Day 1 - Monday 21 April	
Time	Event
09.30 – 10.00	Transport from hotel to QAA offices
10.00 – 11.00	Meeting with Peter Williams (Chief Executive of QAA)
11.00 – 11.15	Private meeting of Panel
11.15 – 12.15	Meeting with Sam Younger (Chairman of the Board of QAA)
12.15 – 12.45	Private meeting of Panel
12.45 – 13.45	Sandwich lunch with Jacqui Hare (Pro-Vice-Chancellor, University of Wales Institute, Cardiff)
13.45 – 15.15	Meeting with Stephen Jackson, Douglas Blackstock, Nick Harris, Norman Sharp (Divisional Directors of QAA and members of QAA Executive Committee) and Martin Johnson (Head of Corporate Affairs, QAA)
15.15 – 15.30	Private meeting of Panel
15.30 – 17.00	Meeting with representatives from QAA Reviews Group & Enhancement Group (Deputy Directors - Gillian King, Gillian Hayes; Assistant Directors – Shona Patterson, Elaine Harries Jenkins, Ian Welch, Gill Clarke)
17.00 – 17.30	Private meeting of Panel
17.30 – 18.00	Transport from QAA offices to The Greenway Hotel
19.30	Dinner
After dinner	Panel discussion in the Austen Room

Day 2 - Tuesday 22 April	
Time	Event
09.30 – 10.00	Transport from hotel to QAA offices
10.00 – 11.00	Meeting with Julian Ellis and David Gale (Assistant Directors, QAA responsible for operations in Wales)
11.00 – 11.15	Private meeting of Panel
11.15 – 12.15	Meeting with QAA reviewers/auditors: Bob Munn (University of Manchester) and Clare Morris (University of Gloucester)
12.15 – 13.00	Video conference with Emma Creasey (Policy Officer, Learning and Teaching Team, HEFCE)
13.15 – 14.15	Sandwich lunch with Rob Cuthbert (Deputy Vice-Chancellor, University of West of England) and Richard Doughty (President of the Students' Union, University of Essex)
14.15 – 15.15	Meeting with Peter Williams to clarify any outstanding issues
15.15 – 16.15	Private meeting of Panel
16.15 – 17.00	Transport from QAA offices to Bristol airport
21.00 – 21.20	Transport from Glasgow airport to The Hilton Hotel
21.30	Dinner

Day 3 - Wednesday 23 April	
Time	Event
9.30 – 10.00	Transport from hotel to QAA offices
10.00 – 11.00	Meeting with Norman Sharp (Director of QAA Scotland)
11.00 – 12.00	Meeting with Nick Kuenssburg (Chairman of the QAA Scotland Committee and a member of the main QAA Board nominated by the Scottish Funding Council)
12.00 – 13.00	Meeting with Assistant Directors (Ailsa Crum, Janice Ross, Thelma Barron, Christine Macpherson and Claire Carney)
13.00 – 14.00	Sandwich lunch with Judith Vincent (Vice Principal for Learning & Teaching,) and Norman McBreen (President of the Students' Association, University of the West of Scotland)
14.00 – 15.00	Meeting with Alan Davidson (auditor/reviewer) and Gavin McCabe (student auditor/reviewer)
15.00 – 17.00	Private meeting of Panel
17.00	Panel departs

## APPENDIX 2

<b>Documentation provided in advance of site visit</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Self evaluation document for confirmation of full membership of ENQA, (QAA, 2008) (and Erratum of minor errors in the SED)</i></li> </ul>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annex A1 - <i>Guidelines for national reviews of ENQA member agencies, (ENQA, 2006)</i> <a href="http://www.enqa.eu/files/review_leaflet.pdf">http://www.enqa.eu/files/review_leaflet.pdf</a></li> <li>• Annex A2 - <i>Guide to the Diploma Supplement, (UK HE Europe Unit, 2006)</i> <a href="http://www.europe-education-formation.fr/docs/Europass/guide-SD-UK.pdf">http://www.europe-education-formation.fr/docs/Europass/guide-SD-UK.pdf</a></li> <li>• Annex A3 – <i>2006-11 strategic plan, (QAA, 2006)</i> <a href="http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/strategicPlan/2006/Strategicplan06-11.pdf">http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/strategicPlan/2006/Strategicplan06-11.pdf</a></li> <li>• Annex A4 - <i>Handbook for institutional audit: England and Northern Ireland, (QAA, 2006)</i> <a href="http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/institutionalAudit/handbook2006/default.asp">http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/institutionalAudit/handbook2006/default.asp</a></li> <li>• Annex A5 - <i>Handbook for enhancement-led institutional review: Scotland, ( QAA, 2003)</i> <a href="http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/ELIR/handbook08/handbookSecondEdition.pdf">http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/ELIR/handbook08/handbookSecondEdition.pdf</a></li> <li>• Annex A6 - <i>Handbook for institutional review: Wales, (QAA, 2003)</i> <a href="http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/reviewWales/handbook/Welsh_handbook_english.pdf">http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/reviewWales/handbook/Welsh_handbook_english.pdf</a></li> <li>• Annex A7 - <i>Handbook for Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review, (QAA, 2008)</i> <a href="http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/IQER/handbook08/Handbook2008.pdf">http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/IQER/handbook08/Handbook2008.pdf</a></li> <li>• Annex A8 - <i>Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, ENQA, 2007)</i> <a href="http://www.enqa.eu/files/ESG_v03.pdf">http://www.enqa.eu/files/ESG_v03.pdf</a></li> <li>• Annex A9 - <i>2006-07 annual review, (QAA, 2008)</i> <a href="http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/annualReports/0607/AR0607.pdf">http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/annualReports/0607/AR0607.pdf</a></li> </ul>			
<b>Additional documentation provided at request of Panel</b>			
<b>Self Assessment Reference</b>	<b>Item</b>	<b>Request</b>	<b>Additional documents:</b>
2.4.2	Process development. Para. 91-92	An example of the development of a QAA process, to demonstrate the level of independent decision making exercised by QAA in achieving fitness for purpose in its processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Document trail for development of ELIR2 in Scotland</i></li> </ul>
2.4.3	Criteria for decisions Para. 93	Further clarification on how consistency in decision-making is achieved across different teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Additional note on how consistency in decision-making is achieved across different teams</i></li> <li>• <i>Supporting paper trails about consistency in decision-making in the context of Institutional Audit/Review</i></li> </ul>
2.4.4	Appointment of reviewers Para. 94	Further (more detailed) information on the training programmes for reviewers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Audit training folder</i></li> </ul>
	Para 95	A note on how both consistency and independence is achieved in the appointment of auditors/reviewers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Additional note on how both consistency and independence is achieved in the appointment of auditors /reviewers</i></li> </ul>

	Para. 98	Cross referencing of self evaluation to Annexes 4-7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Cross- references to handbooks</i></li> </ul>
	Para. 99	A note on how the enhancement theme is maximised across the UK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Additional note on optimisation of enhancement</i></li> <li>• <i>Additional note and supporting papers on optimisation of enhancement (Scotland)</i></li> </ul>
2.4.5	Para 100/101	Any available information on the main audiences for the review/audit reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Additional note on the main audiences for Review and Audit reports</i></li> </ul>
2.4.6	Para 103	<p>1 Actual examples of the follow –up procedures in operation in Scotland and England/Wales where an institutional action plan has been requested.</p> <p>2 Any further comment on the overall consistency and security of outcomes achieved from the two different core methodologies in use; namely the annual dialogue approach in Scotland and the mid –cycle desk check approach in England and Wales.</p> <p>3 How is QAA's independence of judgement maintained and secured throughout the operation of all these processes?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Additional note on the follow up process after a limited or no confidence judgement</i></li> <li>• <i>Documentation on follow-up action taken with two institutions where a 'Limited Confidence' judgement had been given.</i></li> <li>• <i>Additional note on how overall consistency and security of outcomes is achieved from the mid-cycle desk-check approach in England and Wales, together with a wide-ranging set of supporting documentation</i></li> <li>• <i>Additional note on how QAA's independence of judgement is maintained and secured throughout the operation of these processes, with supporting paper trails about consistency in</i></li> </ul>

			<p><i>decision-making in the context of Institutional Audit</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>An additional note on the role of annual discussions &amp; independence of judgements (Scotland)</i></li> </ul>
2.4.7	Para 104/5	Further clarification of the rationale for the differing cycle lengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Additional note of clarification of the rationale for the differing cycle lengths</i></li> </ul>
2.6.4	Para.112/114	A breakdown of funding streams for the last financial year and a functional breakdown of QAA's staffing structure with indicative spend for each principal area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Funding breakdown and indicative spend for 2006-07</i></li> </ul>
2.6.6	Para. 120	A note on how the Board reviews its own performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>A note on how the QAA Board reviews its own performance</i></li> </ul>
2.6.7	Para. 123	Access to a complete set of evaluation questionnaire returns relating to QAA review processes from the different categories involved in a recent Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Summary contained within QAA's Annual Report to HEFCE, (QAA, January, 2008)</i></li> </ul>
	Para.124	Access to a complete trail relating to one appeal and one Complaint	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Confidential example of a representation against the outcome of an academic review was made available during site visit</i></li> </ul>
"Views of key stakeholders"		Access to feedback from key stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Documentation and source documents on stakeholder feedback on QAA's effectiveness</i></li> </ul>
<b>Other documentation submitted</b>			
<i>Additional notes from QAA Scotland (relating to appointment of reviewers and process development)</i>			
<i>A note on planning, monitoring and performance at Group, Executive and Board levels within QAA</i>			
<i>QAA (self) evaluation policy</i>			
<i>Paper prepared for QAA Board on QAA's student engagement strategy</i>			
<i>Paper prepared for QAA Board on the Government's employer engagement strategy</i>			