Quality Assurance of Higher Education in the UK

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Structure of presentation

The UK Quality Assurance Landscape

QAA and the internationalisation of UK HE
Higher education students in the UK (‘16-17)

2.31 million students (approx), of which:
  1.76 million undergraduates
  551,000 postgraduates

Where did they study?
  England (1.89 million)
  Scotland (242,000)
  Wales (129,000)
  Northern Ireland (54,000)

Where were they from?
  UK (1.87 million)
  European Union (135,000)
  Outside the European Union (307,000)
Higher education policy is devolved
UK degrees can only be awarded by legally approved degree-awarding bodies (Recognised Bodies)

*Degree-awarding bodies* are recognised, but not owned by Government. They are *autonomous* and *independent*:

- They are self-accrediting
- They retain the ultimate responsibility for the quality and standards of their degrees
- They can partner with further education colleges and private providers for the delivery of their HE degrees (*including overseas*)
The Higher Education Funding Councils (HEFCs) have traditionally had the statutory responsibility for the quality of public funded higher education.

The HEFCs have traditionally contracted QAA to deliver their statutory responsibility.

**Co-regulation**: Degree-awarding bodies and the HEFCs work together through the QAA to ensure the quality and standards of UK higher education.

**NOTE**: in England HEFCE in April 2018 has been replaced with the Office for Students, a new regulator.
About QAA

Established in 1997, as an independent registered charity through the merger of pre-existing agencies

- The evaluation body established by universities and colleges
- The quality assurance divisions of the funding councils

Offices in England, Scotland & Wales

Funded through:

- **subscriptions** from universities and colleges,
- **contracts** with the higher education funding councils (and now Office for Students)
- **services** to UK private providers, non-UK providers and international agencies/governments
QAA’s mission

to safeguard standards and improve the quality of UK HE *wherever* it is delivered

- We develop reference points setting out expectations for UK HE (*The UK Quality Code for Higher Education*)
- We undertake institutional peer-reviews to check HE providers meet those expectations

*Note:*
- QAA does **not** assess the quality of research
- QAA does **not** accredit programmes
QAA’s UK-wide work

Quality assessment and assurance

UK Quality Code

Advice on degree awarding powers and university title

Assurance of transnational education

Strategic international engagement

Teaching Excellence Framework
Divergent approaches

Different approaches to quality in different UK nations

**England** – risk-based system (baseline compliance)

**Scotland** – enhancement-led approach (reviews on a five year cycle)

**Wales** – new Quality Enhancement Review (reviews at least every six years)

**Northern Ireland** – to be confirmed
Key features of QAA’s approach to Quality Assurance

- The UK Quality Code for Higher Education
- Peer review
- Evidence based
- Risk based
- Student centred
- Enhancement oriented
- Transparent and collaborative
Internationalisation and QAA’s international engagement
Top 10 sending countries of international students in the UK (2016-17)

441,000 international students:

European Union (134,000)

Outside the EU (307,000)

<table>
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<th>Country</th>
<th>Students</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>95090</td>
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<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>17580</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hong Kong (SAR)</td>
<td>16680</td>
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<tr>
<td>India</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>10905</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source of data: HESA (2016-17)
Supporting and enhancing the experience of international students in the UK – a Guide for HE Providers

- Supplements the UK Quality Code
- Consolidates existing good practice, facilitating the sharing of good practice.
- Developed in consultation with the sector.
- Signals that the UK HE sector takes the experience of international students very seriously
- It reminds providers that the quality of the student experience should be at the heart of international student recruitment
TNE is the main area of growth

- Total students in the UK
- International students in the UK
- Off-shore students
Over 80% of UK universities are involved in some form of TNE, delivered all over the world.

Transnational students studying wholly overseas for a UK HE qualification in 2014/15

Source: HESA Aggregate Offshore Record
For more details see: www.hesa.ac.uk/st224

World total 663,915
Snapshot of UK transnational education (2016-17)

709,323 TNE students:

77,388 studying within the European Union (EU)

631,935 outside the EU

Top 10 countries for UK TNE (2015-16, student numbers)

i) Malaysia (74,180)
ii) China (70,240)
iii) Singapore (48,290)
iv) Pakistan (43,870)
v) Nigeria (32,925)
vi) Hong Kong (SAR) (27,390)
vii) Sri Lanka (24,480)
viii) Oman (21,250)
ix) Egypt (21,695)
x) UAE (17,750)

Source of data: HESA (2016-17)
The quality assurance of UK TNE

**Institutional reviews**: comprehensive in scope

**TNE Review**: complementary in-country review process focused on

- how institutional policies and processes are implemented in practice
- better understanding the TNE student experience
- disseminating good practice across the sector / enhancing UK TNE
- re-assuring international stakeholders / safeguard UK HE reputation
The UK Quality Code

Core practice for standards and quality:

Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the standards of its awards are credible and secure and the academic experience is high-quality irrespective of where or how courses are delivered or who delivers them.
A country based approach

TNE Review is carried out on a country-by-country basis

- Malaysia (10), Singapore (11), China (12), UAE (13), Caribbean (14),
  Greece/Cyprus (15), Ireland (17), Hong Kong (18), Malaysia (19)

It is more cost-efficient than an institution-based approach, given the scale and spread of UK TNE

It allows to get an in-depth understanding of the features / challenges involved in operating in particular countries

It allows to establish stronger links with host country QA bodies to lessen burden on providers and agencies too
A partnership approach

We regularly seek to cooperate with host country agencies to avoid regulatory gaps and overlaps:

• striving to lessen the burden on providers and ourselves, and implement a risk based approach

• given the scale and spread of UK TNE, it’s imperative for QAA to rely on host countries’ agencies’ intelligence and cooperation

• bilateral strategic partnerships (MoUs)

• multilateral initiatives (QACHE Toolkit, Quality Beyond Border Group, Cross Border Quality Assurance Network)
MoU partners

- China Academic Degrees and Graduate Academic Information (CDGDC), China
- China Education Association for International Exchange (CEAIE), China
- Commission for Private Education (CPE), Singapore
- Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA), Dubai, UAE
- RAK Free Trade Zone Authority, Ras Al Kaimah, UAE
- Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ), Hong Kong
- Malaysia Qualifications Agency (MQA), Malaysia
- Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), Ireland
- National Institute for Academic Degree and University Evaluation (NIAD-UE), Japan
- Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), Australia
- National Accreditation Board for Higher Education (BAN-PT), Indonesia
- National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE), Malta
- The Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago (ACTT), Trinidad and Tobago
International networks

European Association for Quality Assurance in HE (ENQA)

International Network for QA Agencies in HE (INQAAHE)

Asian-Pacific Quality Network (APQN)

Cross-border Quality Assurance Network (CBQAN)
  • Led by CDGDC, aims at fostering dialogue and strengthening cooperation between Europe-Asia on cross-border quality assurance

Quality Beyond Border Group (QBBG)
  • Led by KHDA – a network of agencies in main sending and receiving countries aimed at strengthening cooperation in the QA of TNE
International initiatives

Quality Assurance of Cross-Border Higher Education (QACHE)

• ENQA-led Erasmus Mundus project (2013-16) – led to development of Toolkit to help QA agencies strengthening cooperation in the QA of TNE

INQAAHE project on challenges to cross-border cooperation

• QAA-led follow up to QACHE, aimed at exploring challenges to implementing the Toolkit and help agencies develop visible and sustainable strategies for cross-border cooperation

Beijing Statement (2016)

• Principles aimed at enhancing cooperation in the QA of UK-China TNE, jointly developed by the British Council, QAA, CEAIE, and CDGDC, part of UK-China P2P dialogue
Thank you