



QAA External Quality Assurance Activity Policy

Policy statement

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) is the independent quality body for UK higher education. QAA is trusted by higher education providers and regulatory bodies to maintain and enhance quality and standards. QAA works with its members and with institutions and bodies throughout the UK and internationally to deliver their shared commitment to the promotion and maintenance of quality and standards. This includes the identification, promotion and enhancement of innovation and good practice in teaching and learning.

QAA as an agency undertakes a range of activities. A key part of our role is to review how providers of higher education maintain their academic standards and quality and [our review methods](#) are listed on the [EQAR Register](#).

All activities where QAA assess providers against the [European Standards and Guidelines \(ESG\)](#) as part of the review method are clearly designated as such. QAA also undertakes enhancement activity which is out of scope of the ESG which supports the sector in developing a quality culture, including:

- We provide vision, expertise and guidance on the topics that matter to staff and students through QAA Membership.
- We develop and maintain sector reference points to inform the approach to quality across the UK.
- We offer specially designed products and services aimed at supporting the development of quality assurance systems and professionals worldwide - this can include capacity building and consultancy work.
- We offer products and services that provide guidance and support relating to the quality and standards of higher education.
- We offer the QE-TNE enhancement scheme.
- Our UK-wide activities include being the regulator of the Access to HE Diploma.

Our review work is referred to as External Quality Assurance Activities (EQA) and these are assessed against the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG). In order to ensure clear separation between EQA activities and other activities, QAA has developed principles and practical approaches to demonstrate clear separation and preserve the independence of EQA activities.

QAA is committed to ensuring that non-EQA activities that relate to areas covered by the ESG do not pose any risk of conflict with EQA activities.

Principles

Transparency

- QAA will clearly and publicly denote where an activity is External Quality Assurance Activity that is undertaken in compliance with the ESG (see 'Practicalities').

Integrity

- **QAA's enhancement activity is for the benefit of the sector** rather than an individual institution in areas where we conduct mandatory reviews. This means that we would not offer products and services to individual institutions where the outcome of that would subsequently be assessed as part of a mandatory EQA activity.
- The Deputy Chief Executive Officer as chair of the Assessment and Reviews Group will provide oversight and has the authority to intervene on any matters raised internally or externally in respect of potential conflict between EQA and other activity.
- For voluntary reviews or where due to the changing regulatory context across the UK if in future there was an instance whereby products or services previously undertaken could impact on voluntary or mandatory EQA activity, QAA would mitigate such risk by:
 - using a team of peer reviewers and QAA staff with no prior involvement in the other product or service
 - ensuring that one year has lapsed between the enhancement activity and the EQA activity in accordance with our conflict of interest policy timeframes
 - ensuring that all enhancement activity outcomes are recommendations that are non-prescriptive in nature and accordingly preserve institutional autonomy.

Practicalities

- All EQA activities take place within the provisions of QAA's [Conflicts of Interest Policy](#).
- To enable a member of the public to easily understand whether a piece of work by QAA is an EQA activity in scope of the ESG:
 - From publication of this policy, all EQA method handbooks, reports, training materials and webpages will carry the following statement(s):
 - The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) provide the framework for internal and external quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area. QAA's review methods are [compliant with these standards](#), as are the [reports we publish](#). More information is available on our [website](#).
 - This review was conducted in compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).
 - Our External Quality Assurance Activity Policy (this document) is published on our website.
 - EQA review methods are consistently referred to as reviews. Terminology such as products, services, evaluation and capacity building is instead used for enhancement or non-EQA activity. Non EQA activity will not include references to ENQA, EQAR or ESG.
- Where non-EQA activity includes a contract, the type of activity and whether it is EQA or non-EQA activity will be specified.

Through the above principles and practical application QAA ensures clear separation and communication of EQA activities.

Published - May 2024

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2024
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786
www.qaa.ac.uk