



## Event summary: Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies' Forum

30 May 2024

Our Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) Forum met on 30 May 2024. Dr Ailsa Crum, Director of Membership, Quality Enhancement and Standards at QAA hosted the session and was joined by QAA colleagues: Quality and Standards Manager, Dr Andy Smith; Quality and Standards Specialists, Si Bullock and Jo Green; and Policy and Public Affairs Officers, Helena Vine and Kevin McStravock. We were also joined by external speakers from Students Organising for Sustainability, Architects Registration Board and Wonkhe for items detailed in the relevant sections below.

Presentation slides are available on our [Membership Resources site](#).

### Policy update

#### England

- Helena Vine noted the recent announcement of a General Election, current polling and summarised the positions of the two main parties. No announcement from Labour on HE, but Brigit Philipson (Shadow Education Secretary) had noted that the party would be considering how to resolve the financial constraints on the sector (increased tuition fees are not ruled out) and Sue Grey (Sir Keir Starmer's, Chief of Staff) has recognised the risk that university finances pose to an incoming administration. The Conservatives have proposed a further crackdown on 'rip off' degrees and an aim to switch 100,000 students to degree apprenticeships.
- Universities UK has commenced work on a White Paper and QAA will be contacting members (and PSRBs) to offer an opportunity to feed into the chapter on regulation.

#### Scotland

- John Swinney succeeded Humza Yousaf as First Minister of Scotland and SNP Leader. He has made minor changes to the Cabinet, but Jenny Gilruth remains in post as Cabinet Secretary for Education.
- Following confirmation of the 2024-25 funding allocations, concerns have been raised by colleges and universities, several of whom made savings over the last year in response to existing financial pressures. Universities Scotland described this as 'the toughest funding settlement universities have faced' and Scottish Funding Council modelling suggests that approx.. 21% of staff posts in colleges could be lost by 2026.
- SFC has published information about Scotland's [Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework](#) (TQEF) on their website. The TQEF is an evolution of Scotland's enhancement-led approach to quality assurance, drawing on strengths of the college and university sectors' existing arrangements. It will be implemented from 2024-25 with QAA leading the delivery of a single external peer review method and national thematic enhancement activity across colleges and universities.

## Wales

- Following Vaughan Gething's election as Welsh Labour leader and First Minister for Wales, Lynne Neagle was appointed as the Cabinet Secretary for Education having previously served as the Deputy Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing.
- The Welsh Government recently announced, with no consultation, that tuition fees would rise from £9,000 to £9,250, in response to the UK-wide financial pressures on universities and colleges.
- The Strategic Priorities for Tertiary Education and Research in Wales was published at the end of February. Key priorities of the Welsh Government relating to quality include:
  - remaining aligned to international quality standards to maintain the international reputation of the system
  - having a quality enhancement approach that recognises a diversity of provision.

The Welsh Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (CTER) will publish a Strategic Plan outlining how it will meet these priorities by the end of 2024.

## Northern Ireland

- The Minister for the Economy overseeing FE and HE in the reconstituted Stormont Assembly is Conor Murphy from Sinn Fein, who was Minister for Finance in the previous executive. Minister Murphy outlined his economic vision in the Assembly in March which included:
  - creating more and better paid apprenticeships and skills academies
  - projects that improve regional balance including expansion of the Ulster University Magee campus
  - increasing the number of students in FE and HE.
- The Economy Committee recently agreed to an inflationary increase in tuition fees of 0.9% for 2024-25 to a maximum of £4,750, after the laying of a statutory instrument making provision for next year's student finance arrangements.
- The minister has ruled out the greater increase in tuition fees recommended by the (UK) Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and committed to a discussion with universities and colleges about alternative approaches to improving funding.

## Delivering integrated climate education, skills and professional standards

Jamie Agombar, Executive Director, Students Organising for Sustainability - UK (SOS-UK) introduced the report which is an output from a St George's House consultation event held in February 2024 convened by SOS-UK and the Environmental Association for Universities and Colleges (EAUC). The event brought together representatives from 15 PSRBs and nine young people alongside education organisations and employers to explore the role of PSRBs in responding to the climate emergency. The full report can be read [here](#).

Jamie drew attention to the lag that exists throughout the education system, from early years to tertiary, between the curriculum and reality of climate change and the concerns of young people about the lack of response to the climate emergency. He noted that PSRBs could address these concerns by engaging with the [Professional Bodies Climate Action Charter](#) and having conversations about how they can influence curricula via subject benchmarks

and professional standards. Jamie went on to make the case that the cyclical review of benchmarks/standards offers an opportunity for PSRBs to co-create, with young people, new standards and to initiate a conversation about the purpose of education and how it might be transformed to progress environmental sustainability.

Jamie was joined by Josh Tregate, an undergraduate at Imperial College studying mechanical and nuclear engineering, and Paul Bailey, CEO of the Engineering Council. They illustrated how [Accreditation of Higher Education Programmes](#) by the Engineering Council influenced the curriculum at Imperial through a compulsory professional standards module that includes sustainability, and which must be passed. Josh reflected that, while this ensured engagement, it might be better if sustainability was embedded through all the modules that he studied, noting that although his experience was specific to engineering, the principles of the approach adopted by the Engineering Council are applicable to other disciplines.

For further information please contact Jamie via [LinkedIn](#).

## Additional resources

- The annual [Sustainability Skill Survey](#) commissioned by SOS-UK.
- QAA has supported Collaborative Enhancement Projects in the area of [Education for Sustainable Development](#).
- For 2024-25, QAA is supporting a Collaborative Enhancement Project, [Using AI to promote education for sustainable development and widen access to digital skills](#).
- QAA has produced a [range of resources](#) in different formats for our members including Guidance (jointly with Advance HE) on Education for Sustainable Development.

## Architects Registration Board: Changes to Competency Frameworks

Richard Beet, Policy Manager (Education and Training), Architects Registration Board (ARB) gave a short overview of the changes the ARB has made to the conditions of registration for Architects in the UK in response to Dame Judith Hackitt's [Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety](#). Briefly the changes move away from the current seven-year journey that starts with an undergraduate degree in architecture and culminates with a professional practice examination. In its place the ARB will accredit Level 7 awards that deliver the academic outcomes for five competencies and an additional qualification that delivers the practice outcomes for those competencies. Successful completion of both stages and evidencing all competencies will lead to registration.

Any feedback on this presentation can be addressed to [membership@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:membership@qaa.ac.uk)

## QAA Apprenticeship Toolkit and Collaborative Enhancement Project

Jo Green, Quality and Standards Specialist at QAA introduced the [Higher Education Apprenticeships Toolkit](#), a resource developed to support providers across the UK. It offers guidance on developing apprenticeships, supporting the apprentice's journey and quality assuring the awards. Jo also drew attention to three QAA Collaborative Enhancement Projects that focus on apprenticeships including the recently completed project [Teaching Degree Apprenticeships \(DA\): Challenges, Motivations, Lessons Learnt and Good Practice](#)

## [Guidelines.](#)

Any questions or requests for further information can be addressed to [membership@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:membership@qaa.ac.uk)

## **Student time poverty - presentation and discussion**

Mack Marshall from Wonkhe gave a presentation on the key messages arising from [Belong](#), a new student insight platform created by Wonkhe and their partners at [Cibyl](#) (part of Group GTI). His presentation illustrated how food inflation was combining with a fall in the value of the maintenance loan to reduce the disposable income of students which in turn influences their academic and non-academic choices.

Other consequences are more students having longer commutes to campus as they seek affordable housing and the increased number of hours students spend working to earn money. These factors mean that time is more precious, and students consider best use of time which may preclude their coming to campus. Mack went on to explore how students juggle so many competing demands and what this means for students' sense of belonging and loneliness.

## **Update on the redevelopment of the UK Quality Code**

Dr Andy Smith, Quality and Standards Manager at QAA, gave a brief overview of the way that QAA has redeveloped the UK Quality Code including outlining its proposed structure and format. The revised Quality Code will be published on 27 June 2024 and will comprise 12 Sector-Agreed Principles that align with the European Standards and Guidance (ESG) each of which will be underpinned by associated key practices that, ultimately, will link to supporting Advice and Guidance and other sector reference points. Over the next three years, QAA will refresh the Advice and Guidance associated with each principle. Work on the first sections will begin in September 2024 covering:

- Principle 1 - Taking a strategic approach to managing quality and standards
- Principle 2 - Engaging students as partners
- Principle 8 - Operating partnerships with other organisations.

QAA is currently recruiting members of the writing groups and expert readers - more information and details of the application process can be found on the [QAA website](#).

If you have any further questions about the redevelopment of the Quality Code or the Advice and Guidance please contact [membership@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:membership@qaa.ac.uk)

## **Feedback on PSRB Survey from QAA Members**

Si Bullock, Quality and Standards Specialist at QAA presented the initial results and draft recommendations of a survey of QAA Members about their engagement with PSRBs. There were 62 responses (52 English providers, five from Scotland and five from Wales) from 51 institutions. Respondents held 39 different roles with varying levels of seniority.

Questions covered the number of accredited programmes, the locus of responsibility for monitoring and oversight, the frequency of re-accreditation and if/how re-accreditation aligned with periodic review. The survey also explored the role of external examiners, whether there was systematic analysis of accreditation outcomes and the role of accreditation in enhancement. Analysis of the responses has led to a series of *draft* recommendations for providers and PSRBs.

Any feedback or reflections on the survey or draft recommendations can be addressed to [membership@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:membership@qaa.ac.uk)

## Get in touch

All staff and students at QAA Member institutions can access our [QAA Membership Resources](#) site. If you are using the site for the first time, you will be asked to complete a very short [online registration form](#) which will let you make use of the fantastic resources.

If you would like to contribute to QAA work, either by making suggestions for topics or sharing your practice, please email [membership@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:membership@qaa.ac.uk) or contact your QAA Membership Engagement Manager - we will be delighted to hear from you. You can also keep up to date with QAA's work by signing up to receive our weekly [Member Update](#).

PSRB officers are welcome to keep in touch with us through our website and by engaging with our PSRB Forum meetings. If you have topics you would like to contribute or ensure we cover in future sessions, please let us know by emailing [membership@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:membership@qaa.ac.uk)

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