



Event summary: Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies' Forum

11 December 2024

Our Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) Forum met on 11 December 2024.

Dr Andy Smith, QAA Quality and Standards Manager, hosted the session and was joined by QAA colleagues: Helena Vine, Lead Policy Officer (England), Dr Demelza Curnow, Lead Quality Manager, and Ruth Burchell, Quality and Standards Specialist.

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

Policy update

England

- Helena Vine noted the tuition fee increase, to £9,535 for 2025/26, as well as the maintenance loans increase by 3.1%. The impact on providers was not yet clear, due in part to the broader financial environment they operate in - for instance, most of the additional income this rise would generate will likely be cancelled out by the National Insurance employer contributions.
- The Office for Students (OfS) has also announced a pause on new provider and Degree Awarding Powers applications in order to focus on the financial sustainability of providers.
- We are expecting a consultation from DfE in January around franchising – it is widely expected that there will be some kind of proposal about registering all delivery providers with the OfS. It remains to be seen how this intersects with the pause in the OfS register.
- We know that the government plans to publish a post-16 strategy by next summer, which will lay out their plans for the sector. We would expect there to be some form of consultation around the strategy and plans – with potential legislation to follow.

Scotland

- This academic year, Scotland's new tertiary-wide approach to quality was launched. It's the first method in the UK that covers both colleges and universities.

- There will also be a new version of the Enhancement Themes – Scotland's Tertiary Enhancement Project. The first topic under this is supporting diverse learner journeys – the first year of the cycle will act as a discovery phase where staff and students work together to explore the topic and work up proposals for collaborative projects.

Wales

- Wales will follow England in raising tuition fees, as well as a 1.6% uplift in the maintenance loan. QAA staff recently met with Vikki Howells, Welsh Minister for Further and Higher Education, who is interested in improving participation rates and FE and HE collaboration.

Joint project with Quality Strategy Network (QSN) on approaches to monitoring, review and evaluation processes

Dr Demelza Curnow, Lead Quality Manager at QAA, introduced the project, and gave a brief introduction to the partner organisation, Quality Strategy Network (QSN). The joint project came about because monitoring, review and evaluation was an area of shared interest. The project was officially launched in September 2023 and the outputs were published this September (2024). There was a focus on three areas: annual ongoing review, cyclical review, and currency of curriculum. The project was interested in different approaches to the review methods, the relationship between activities, the 'unit' of review and the purpose (e.g. meeting external regulatory requirements, internal planning needs or enhancement). The position and influence of PSRSB accreditation on monitoring was considered as part of the research, and proved to be possibly less impactful on monitoring approaches than the project team expected.

Broadly, the sector is aligned for annual activity, but periodic activity was more diverse. The outputs were: a summary report setting out seven key findings; a 'choosing your approach' tool which offers different ways of monitoring, reviewing and evaluating, illustrated with examples of practice; and 'planning your approach' which is structured around six self-reflective questions and intended to support conversations within providers. Definitions were also included, as clearer distinctions were needed between the three terms (monitoring, reviewing and evaluating), particularly reviewing and evaluating. Overarching approaches to annual ongoing activity were assurance-based and data-driven, and exceptions reporting was common. There was significant diversity in approaches to periodic or cyclical review activity.

The project's outputs are available for QAA members on the [Members Resources Area](#).

Competence standards and Subject Benchmark Standards (SBS)

Dr Andy Smith outlined the background to the QAA's recent work on competence Standards, ie the Abrahart case and EHRC advice note on the needs and rights of disabled students in terms of reasonable adjustments to assessments. SBS have always set out the minimum academic standards a student must meet to pass a

course of study, aligned to threshold level descriptors set out in the Frameworks for HE qualifications. These are translated, often through curriculum review, into learning outcomes for individual programmes of study. SBS have traditionally avoided using the phrase 'competence standards'. We are updating our thinking on this, and at our next PSRB forum we will continue the discussion on competence standards. QAA continue to work with the Disabled Students Commission on advice for the sector which will be published in 2025.

QAA also extended an invitation to PSRBs to join the newly announced [SBS advisory groups](#), who will be reviewing the following disciplines:

- Architecture
- Art and Design
- History of Art, Architecture and Design
- Social Work
- Sociology
- Social Policy.

Update on the new UK Quality Code

Ruth Burchell, Quality and Standards Specialist gave a brief overview of the launch of the new UK Quality Code. The revised Code was published in June 2024 and comprises 12 Sector-Agreed Principles that align with the European Standards and Guidance (ESG). The new Code is UK-wide, and applies across tertiary settings which are developing across the UK nations. This version of the Code has been developed in close collaboration with the higher education sector.

Ruth concentrated on one or two of the new principles, each of which are underpinned by key practices that will link to supporting Advice and Guidance that are currently being developed. 'Engaging in external review and accreditation', for instance, intersects directly with PSRB activity in accrediting courses. It enables providers to use external accreditation to drive improvement of their provision and encourages meaningful conversations with PSRBs.

Over the next three years, QAA will refresh the Advice and Guidance associated with each principle. Work on the first sections began in September 2024 covering:

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

These advice and guidance materials will concentrate more on the positive indicators of good practice, and some may be more detailed than others so there will be variability on length. Ruth encouraged PSRBs to get involved in the drafting of future sections as their input would be extremely valuable. If you have any further questions about the redevelopment of the Quality Code or the Advice and Guidance please contact 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 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.

Published – December 2024

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