

**QAA**

Educational Oversight: One Year On

Executive summary

In 2012, The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) reviewed 209 providers under three educational oversight methods: Review for Educational Oversight (REO), Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight (RSEO), and Embedded College Review for Educational Oversight (ECREO). This report draws on the results of this process, by focusing specifically on judgements reached by the review teams, good practice elicited and recommendations made, as well as feedback gathered by coordinators, reviewers and providers regarding their involvement. The student voice, and its contribution to this process, is also highlighted.

Overall, the success rate for reviews conducted in 2012 was very high: 85 per cent of REOs had confirmed judgements of confidence and reliance, all RSEOs were successful and 82 per cent of ECREOs resulted in judgements of confidence and reliance. In support of the review process, QAA received 101 student submissions in written and/or video format, which were prepared with or without staff support.

Review teams identified 1,190 features of good practice and recommendations for action.

The key findings are:

- the provision of quality student support was often commended as good practice (85 instances), frequently being described as informal processes sustained by highly committed academic staff
- collaborations with external bodies were more frequently expressed as good practice (36 instances), indicative of a close relationship with awarding bodies/organisations and/or professional bodies and the industry, in general
- student engagement was reported in comparable terms under good practice (31 instances) and desirable recommendations (33 instances)
- the number of good practice related to teaching and learning (51 instances) was more than double the number of recommendations in this area (24 instances), excluding good practice and recommendations on assessment and plagiarism
- essential recommendations were made predominantly in the areas relating to quality assurance strategies (13 instances) and information (7 instances)
- the area relating to assessment and plagiarism frequently received advisable recommendations (65 instances)
- staff recruitment and development received more desirable recommendations (86 instances) than advisable ones (30 instances)
- the change from informal quality assurance structures to formalised and integrated systems was identified as the most pressing area for providers (with only three instances of good practice and 83 instances of advisable recommendations and 43 instances of desirable recommendations).

At the end of this process, coordinators, reviewers and providers agreed that the review achieved its aim, that the self-evaluation was useful and the student submission was balanced, and that the report and action plan were relevant.

“It doesn't merely set a benchmark for the private sector, it also performs a significant developmental role.” [Reviewer]

“The insight that we gained of ourselves as an institution during the self evaluation process was invaluable.” [Provider]

“The final report was a cause of pride amongst all of the staff. The action plan has given direction to the forthcoming months.” [Provider]

Introduction

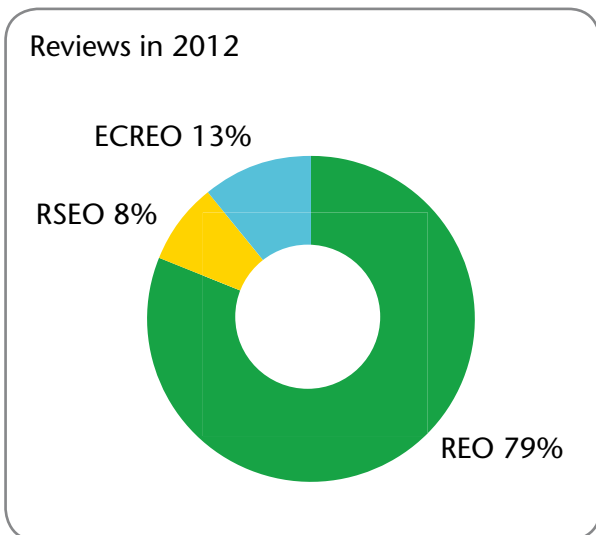
Educational oversight (EO) by a designated body is a requirement for Highly Trusted Sponsor status. In 2011, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) was recognised by the Home Office as a designated body for higher education providers.

Reviews for educational oversight looks at how providers meet the Expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code), published by QAA. The review process results in judgements of confidence, limited confidence or no confidence for academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities and a conclusion that reliance can or cannot be placed on the information that the provider produces for its intended audiences. Additionally, teams identify good practice and recommendations. Recommendations are categorised as essential, advisable or desirable. The provider's action plan in response to the team's findings is published alongside the report. Progress with the action plan is the focus of an annual monitoring report.

Educational oversight reviews reflect the core principles of QAA review processes. In line with QAA's mission, reviews are intended in part to contribute to the enhancement of UK higher education and to reinforce its reputation worldwide.

This report analyses the outcomes of the education oversight process carried out in 2012 and highlights emerging trends. It is intended to be of particular interest to providers who underwent an EO review in 2012, and who are keen to compare and contrast their own provision with other providers who underwent the same type of review. For these providers the report is intended to have a developmental role, supporting initiatives of further improvement. The report will also be of interest to new providers, who have applied to QAA for an EO review in 2013 or who are intending to apply in future.

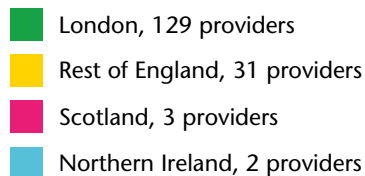
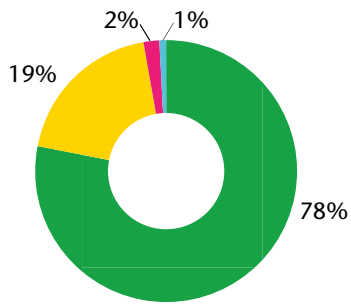
Reviews in 2012



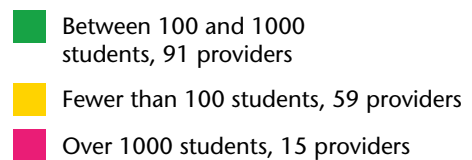
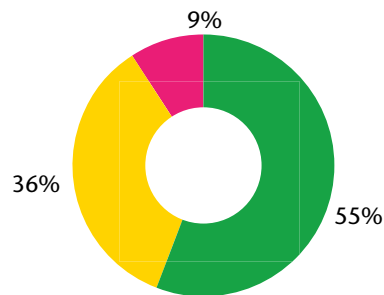
QAA reviewed 209 providers in 2012: 165 providers were reviewed under the Review for Educational Oversight (REO) method, 16 providers under the Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight (RSEO) method, and 28 under the Embedded College Review for Educational Oversight (ECREO) method.

Of the 165 REOs, most providers reviewed were located in London (129). Most providers (55 per cent) had student numbers ranging between 100 and 1,000, while 36 per cent had fewer than 100 students. Regarding the type of provision, the great majority of providers (74 per cent) offered courses in business management and finance. The graphic representations below indicate the full distribution.

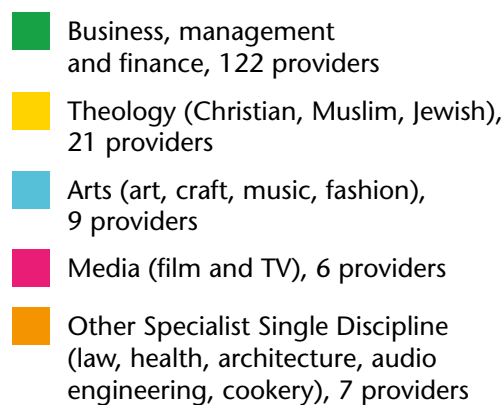
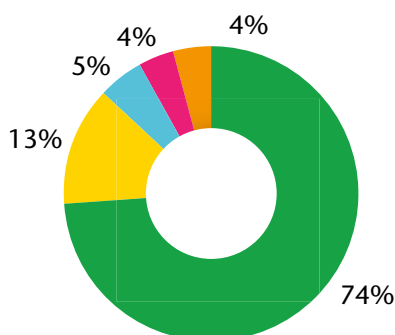
Location of providers



Number of students



Type of provider



Student involvement in the EO process

Student involvement is an important part of all QAA reviews. Such involvement takes place in two principal ways: the preparation of an optional student submission to the QAA review team, and in meetings with the review team. Students generally welcomed this opportunity to evaluate the quality of the provision they experienced.

Of the 209 providers reviewed in 2012, QAA received 77 written student submissions, 10 video submissions, and 14 combined submission (both written and video). This amounts to just fewer than half, i.e. 48 per cent of providers having presented a student submission, either in written form, video or both.

There were different approaches to the preparation of the student submissions:

- some students prepared the report completely autonomously without any involvement of staff. The student submission team designed their own process of data collection and analysis, the results of which were then compiled into the report
- some student representatives were supported by management staff. In these cases students and staff collaborated and consulted on common issues, to ensure coherence between the self-evaluation document and student submission
- in some instances, management staff collected information from students and prepared the report by consulting student representatives of the opinions expressed.

The collection of data was largely based on questionnaires designed for this occasion or existing as feedback forms in the internal quality loop of the College. Minuted focus groups and video recordings of discussions were also used.

Overall, according to the submissions received, students thought that their courses provided value for money, and that their experience of study was very positive. Teaching and the relationship with teaching staff, as well as aspects relating to assessment and feedback on assessment were valued, while administration and administrative staff, facilities (library, computing, and other), and tuition in English were aspects which raised some concerns.

The majority of the students seemed to be very happy with the teaching staff, with students expressing views such as 'teachers are passionate and positive'. In addition, most students feel their relationships with the teachers are very good and that the teachers are 'excellent', 'very kind', 'positive', 'passionate', 'enthusiastic', 'very supportive', 'friendly', and 'helpful', and that they foster open-mindedness and are responsive to their needs.

[Student submission, London Foundation Campus, 2012]

Students expressed a great deal of satisfaction with academic staff - their subject knowledge, teaching ability and approachability. Similarly, students were content with the academic and pastoral support provided by academic staff, although some did express a desire for greater social interaction between staff and students. With some exceptions, students were generally satisfied with the way they were assessed, although some would have preferred more detailed feedback on their assessed work.

Complaints about organisational matters and administrative procedures (such as timetabling, changes to courses, and assistance with finding accommodation) were quite common. One area in which students needed greater support was general careers advice. Students were also more critical of facilities, particularly libraries and resources made available. Some providers did not have a library; some libraries were considered by students to be physically too small or to have too few books; some did not have lending facilities, and some had very limited opening hours. Computing facilities were also an area of concern, particularly the availability of computers and the speed of networks. At the other extreme, some providers had arrangements with universities or other educational institutions by which their students had full access to the larger organisation's extensive facilities.

A specific area of interest for international students related to tuition in English. Some students voiced concern over the quantity and quality of tuition in English available to them. In particular, they said there was a need for tuition at different levels, to match the differing levels of ability and familiarity with the language of individual learners.

For review teams, the student submission proved invaluable as it validated aspects indicated in the provider's self-evaluation report. It highlighted issues that could require more detailed attention during the review visit and it indicated the approach the provider takes to student engagement with quality assurance processes. During the review visit, students were given the opportunity to confirm the findings presented in the student submission and to further discuss the issues that had been noted.

Outcomes from reviews conducted in 2012

For reviews conducted in 2012, 85 per cent of REOs had confirmed judgements of confidence and reliance, all RSEOs were successful and 82 per cent of ECREOs resulted in judgements of confidence and reliance.

	Confirmed judgements of confidence and reliance (per cent)	Confirmed judgements of limited confidence and/or no reliance (per cent)	Confirmed judgements of no confidence (per cent)
REO	140 (85%)	13 (8%)	12 (7%)
RSEO	16 (100%)	-	-
ECREO	23 (82%)	5 (18%)	0

Judgements

For reviews conducted in 2012, the following judgements were reached:

	Academic standards			Quality of learning opportunities			Information	
	Confidence (%)	Limited confidence (%)	No confidence (%)	Confidence (%)	Limited confidence (%)	No confidence (%)	Reliance	No reliance
REO	143 (87%)	12 (7%)	10 (6%)	147 (89%)	11 (7%)	7 (4%)	153 (93%)	12 (7%)
RSEO	16 (100%)	-	-	16 (100%)	-	-	16 (100%)	-
ECREO	23 (82%)	5 (18%)	-	28 (100%)	-	-	26 (93%)	2 limited reliance (7%)

Good practice and recommendations

Review teams also identified **good practice**, defined as

practice making a particularly positive contribution to the provider's management of academic standards and/or academic quality, and which is worthy of wider dissemination within and/or beyond the provider (REO/ECREO/RSEO handbooks, pages 8/10/7).

They also made **recommendations** for improving the provider's management of its higher education provision, categorised as essential, advisable or desirable, according to priority.

- **Essential recommendations** refer to issues that the review team believes are currently putting quality and/or standards at risk and hence require urgent corrective action.
- **Advisable recommendations** relate to matters that the review team believes have the potential to put quality and/or standards at risk and hence require preventative corrective action.
- **Desirable recommendations** relate to matters that the review team believes have the potential to enhance quality, build capacity and/or further secure standards.

(REO/ECREO/RSEO handbooks, pages 8/10/7)

Of all reviews carried out in 2012, review teams identified 1,190 features of good practice and recommendations for action. For the purpose of this report, the good practice and recommendations were classified into seven main topic areas, with relevant subheadings where appropriate.

1 Quality assurance strategies and mechanisms

1.1 Implementing policies and procedures

1.2 Formalising quality assurance practices

1.3 Enhancing student engagement with quality assurance processes

1.4 Engaging with external reference points, including the Academic Infrastructure and, more recently, the Quality Code

1.5 Improving annual monitoring and review processes

2 Teaching and learning, including opportunities/strategies for enhancement, development of teaching materials, innovative teaching and learning practices

2.1 Assessment, as well as aspects related to plagiarism

3 Information available to the general public/prospective students/current students, including aspects relating to the management and oversight of the website and virtual learning environment to maintain current, accurate and complete information, as well as aspects relating to version control

- 4 **Student support**, including for recruitment/induction, academic and pastoral purposes
- 5 **Staff recruitment and development**
- 6 **Resources**
- 7 **Collaboration** with/support from external/professional bodies and industry/commerce.

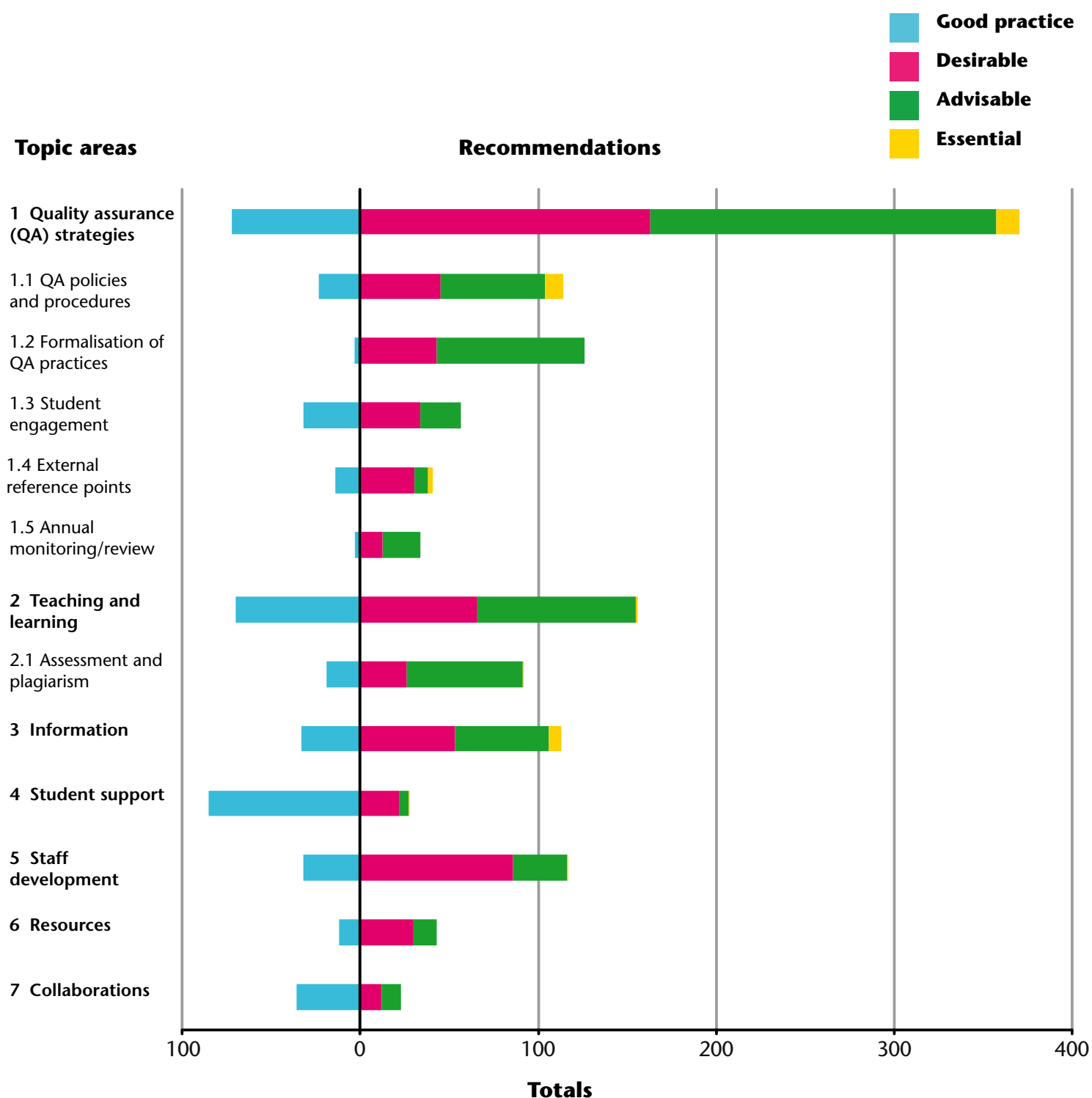
Each reported good practice/recommendation was assigned to the main topic area it most closely relates to, although some good practice/recommendations may relate to more than one topic.

Overall, there were 2.5 times more recommendations (850) made than features of good practice (340) identified. There were 23 essential recommendations out of a total of 850, that is 2.7 per cent, predominantly relating to quality assurance mechanisms (13) and information (seven). Advisable recommendations are found in all areas, with the most appearing under formalisation of quality assurance practices (83), assessment (65), information (53) and resources (13). Desirable recommendations are predominant for staff recruitment and development (86).

Student engagement was reported in comparable terms under good practice (31) and desirable recommendations (33). Formalisation of quality assurance practices was considerably imbalanced between good practice (three) and recommendations (126). For teaching and learning the scale was (slightly) tilted in favour of good practice (51), which correlates to the views expressed in the student submissions. However, there were three times as many advisable recommendations (65) on assessment and plagiarism than good practice (19) and 86 desirable recommendations on staff recruitment and development. In contrast to strong concerns expressed in the student submissions, the category of resources did not gather as many recommendations as might have been expected: 43 recommendations against 12 features of good practice.

It is notable that providers had particularly good quality student support (85 instances of good practice), frequently as informal processes sustained by highly committed academic staff, rather than administrative staff (as also confirmed by the student submissions). Collaborations with external bodies were more frequently expressed as good practice (36), indicative of a close relationship with awarding bodies/organisations and/or professional bodies and the industry, in general.

The graph below shows the number of instances of good practice and the type of recommendations under each topic area.



Topic area 1: Quality assurance strategies and mechanisms

Topic area 1 comprises all items of good practice and recommendation which touch on issues related to quality assurance strategies and mechanisms used by providers. These issues have been divided into five main categories which are discussed in more detail below. Overall, review teams identified 72 features of good practice and made 13 essential, 194 advisable and 163 desirable recommendations.

1.1 Implementing policies and procedures

This heading gathers issues relating to the appropriateness of policies and procedures and the necessity to have in place review mechanisms for these. It also commends integrated approaches to quality assurance that relate to quality assurance as a systemic institutional component.

Good practice (23) in this area frequently highlighted close collaboration and effective communication between management and teaching staff to ensure quality, as well as the promotion of relevant, fit-for-purpose and comprehensive quality handbooks.

Examples of good practice:

the close and regular engagement between key staff in the College management team and tutors enables collective and consistent assurance of quality of provision [Bradford College of Management]

the Academic Standards and Quality Handbook provides staff with comprehensive information and guidance relating to the management of academic standards and quality assurance [British Institute of Technology and E-commerce Ltd]

There were 10 essential, 59 advisable, and 45 desirable recommendations made, most commonly relating to the following:

- fully implement policies and procedures
- consistently apply policies and procedures
- regularly monitor appropriateness of Quality Manual, policies and procedures and revise to ensure these are fit for purpose and aligned with actual College practice
- ensure timeliness of quality assurance decisions
- disseminate quality assurance decisions of various committees to other relevant committees as well as staff and students
- recognise and disseminate good quality assurance practices
- implement internal verification processes and ensure consistency of such processes throughout the provision
- collect and analyse student achievement data to inform the strategic and operational management of the provision
- develop appropriate processes to respond to external examiner reports.

Examples of recommendations:

undertake an immediate, thorough review to rationalise and simplify all policies and procedures and a systematic evaluation of these after each cycle of the quality assurance process [Advisable]

bring its policies and procedures together in a single, revised Quality Handbook, and publish them in a format which is accessible and user-friendly for all staff and students [Advisable]

establish a more systematic way of identifying and disseminating GP to maintain standards and further enhance quality [Desirable]

make full use of key student performance data to inform quality enhancement processes [Advisable]

review its processes and systems for responding to external examiners' reports in order that required actions can be taken in a timely manner [Advisable]

1.2 Formalising quality assurance practices

This area resulted in a large number of recommendations made by review teams: 83 advisable and 43 desirable recommendations. For many providers reviewed in 2012, especially smaller ones, moving from an informal quality assurance structure to a formalised and integrated system

was a most pressing issue. The main point of focus was organising operational structures with committees, roles and reporting lines clearly defined. However, good practice was also recorded.

There were three instances of good practice which highlighted the existence of effective committee structures and the recognition and establishment of quality assurance roles to support more specialised work, such as, for example, Director of Communications, Student Support Officer and Accreditation Officer.

Examples of good practice:

the simple but highly effective committee structure, which supports and maintains academic quality and standards
[London Institute of Technology]

Recommendations revolved predominantly around the activities of committee structures, but not exclusively. For this area, recommendations referred to the following types of action to be considered by providers:

- formalise quality assurance processes and systems
- better document quality assurance processes and systems
- clarify roles and responsibilities
- define and review (the effectiveness of) committee structures
- clarify the remit and terms of reference for committees
- formalise operation of committees and ensure committees operate according to terms of reference
- ensure that committees make appropriate use of information relating to quality assurance
- ensure effective record-keeping of committees.

Examples of recommendations:

ensure that all quality assurance processes, roles and responsibilities are fully implemented, managed and monitored [Advisable]

systematically record the minutes and action plans arising from the deliberations of all academic committees, including relevant meetings of the Senior Management Team [Advisable]

1.3 Enhancing student engagement with quality assurance processes

Engaging students to contribute to quality assurance processes was recognised by some providers as an important feature of quality assurance management, and 31 instances of good practice was promoted in this area. However, student engagement mechanisms were frequently underdeveloped and required (sometimes immediate) actions, with eight advisable and 33 desirable recommendations noted.

Examples of good practice:

the student voice is canvassed widely and used to inform prompt and effective responses which, in turn, are communicated clearly to the student body [Magna Carta College]

Under recommendations, the main point of focus was engaging students through appropriate representation and opportunity for feedback. Recommendations referred to the following areas of action to be taken:

- ensure and increase student participation in quality assurance processes
- formalise student engagement through student representation
- provide opportunities for training and development of student representatives
- ensure feedback is gathered from students and appropriately analysed [and] formalise processes for gathering feedback from students

- evaluate/review student feedback questionnaire to produce measurable and appropriate results
- ensure issues arising from student feedback are appropriately actioned [and] formalise processes to address student feedback
- develop more transparent mechanisms for informing students of actions completed.

Examples of recommendations:

formalise the process for student representation and for receiving feedback from students [Desirable]

strengthen the personal development training opportunities available for student representatives [Desirable]

formalise the student feedback system to monitor actions taken and inform students and staff of the outcomes [Advisable]

1.4 Engaging with external reference points

Good practice in this area (13 instances) covered formal and explicit engagement with, and effective mapping of, policies and procedures to the Academic Infrastructure and its constituent parts and, more recently, the Quality Code. Additionally noted are the engagement with professional standards, and existing mechanisms for compliance with awarding organisations' requirements.

Examples of good practice:

the provider's integrated and thorough engagement with the Academic Infrastructure is enhanced by the articulation of the precepts of *The Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* in key documentation [West Dean College - The Edward James Foundation]

the embedding of professional standards, through an extensive range and variety of opportunities and practice, in the student experience [London Centre of Contemporary Music]

The three essential, 21 advisable and 30 desirable recommendations urged for the following types of action:

- develop an understanding of external reference points
- ensure policies and practices are aligned to the Academic Infrastructure/the Quality Code
- engage with the Academic Infrastructure/Quality Code at all levels (management and teaching staff) - also an aspect of staff development
- ensure compliance with external reference points, including awarding body/organisation requirements
- formalise the use of external reference points.

Examples of recommendations:

extend the Quality Manual to provide more comprehensive information on all external reference points relevant to the provision [Desirable]

review the internal verification policy to ensure consistency with the awarding body and organisation's requirements [Desirable]

update course documentation to ensure that it aligns with the awarding body's regulations [Advisable]

1.5 Improving annual monitoring and periodic review processes

Annual monitoring and periodic review was regarded as good practice in only two instances, but where such good practice could be identified it related to comprehensive and effective review processes. However, in many more instances such processes were deemed inadequate, resulting in 23 advisable and 12 desirable recommendations.

Examples of good practice:

the Annual College Course Review is comprehensive, rigorous and evaluative, and provides the College with a clear evaluation of the management of academic standards [London College of Business]

The recommendations covered such actions to be taken as:

- review appropriateness of annual monitoring processes
- ensure a more systematic/comprehensive review and reporting of academic standards and quality
- ensure an appropriate follow-up procedure to periodic review
- design a more systematic approach to student data elicited from periodic review
- formalise annual monitoring.

Examples of recommendations:

refine the annual monitoring reports to monitor its course provision more effectively [Advisable]

ensure that the annual monitoring process systematically reviews all higher education programmes and takes due account of relevant external evidence [Advisable]

ensure that the annual programme reviews fully and consistently utilise data and student feedback in the review and evaluation of all provision [Advisable]

formalise the annual monitoring process, to reflect the outcomes of external moderation, student feedback, progression data and teaching observation, and ensure full consideration by Academic Board [Advisable]

Topic area 2: Teaching and learning

For many providers, teaching and learning was highlighted as an area with substantial good practice (51 instances). Review teams noted the following areas of good practice, some of which specifically cater for international students: English language support; cultural and intercultural negotiation; and comprehensive learning support focused on UK higher education specificities, including the development of academic writing skills. Enhancing teaching through the provision of high quality teaching materials which effectively consider profession-based aspects was also highlighted. The practice of monitoring attendance and relating attendance to learning performance to provide support was also particularly constructive for some categories of international students.

Examples of good practice:

comprehensive use is made of learning journals to record formative feedback and promote reflective practice [Le Cordon Bleu Limited]

the introduction of a mandatory module in academic English to improve the communication skills of students and the procedures used to verify the authenticity of prospective students' International English Language Testing System certificates [Cranford College]

the academic British Life and Culture course effectively complements the internship process [Anglo American Educational Services]

the College's emphasis on students' recognition of proper professional boundaries, safe practice and the need at times for referral to other professional and medical practitioners demonstrates that the College has a high regard for professional protocols and professional standards [College of Naturopathic Medicine]

Recommendations for teaching and learning (24 advisable and 40 desirable) covered the following types of action:

- develop/fully implement/revise teaching and learning strategy [23 counts]
- recognise and disseminate good teaching practice
- provide an accurate and complete handbook with clearly identified and disseminated programme outcomes
- produce more comprehensive programme specification to clearly articulate how programmes will be managed, delivered and assessed
- monitor progression and completion rates to seek to improve pass rates
- develop learning resources, in e-format
- formalise systems to support students' learning
- synchronise teaching
- formalise teaching observation to informing teaching and learning strategies
- develop a more robust teaching observation scheme.

Recommendations cover the following areas:

develop a full teaching and learning strategy that is shared with staff and students [Advisable]

improve students' preparation for higher level study and their understanding of academic writing [Advisable]

publish programme specifications that set out programme aims, content, methods of delivery assessment and progression/career opportunities [Desirable]

implement a more formal, proactive and systematic approach to the provision of English language support for overseas students [Desirable]

facilitate communication among faculty members in order to reduce the likelihood of students experiencing overlapping syllabuses in different courses [Desirable]

2.1 Assessment and plagiarism

In this area, there were many more recommendations (92) than good practice (19), Most recommendations were advisable (65), with one graded essential and 26 desirable.

Good practice highlighted aspects such as quality of formative assessment, developmental and timely feedback, and security of student assessment processes.

Examples of good practice:

the high-quality, individualised feedback on assessments provided in a timely manner [Navitas UK Holdings Ltd]

the consistent provision of full and detailed feedback to students identifies and critically analyses individual achievement and supports students' creative development [London Centre of Contemporary Music]

the School has rigorous moderation arrangements that underpin the security of student assessment [KLC School of Design]

Recommendations for action were along the following main lines:

- provide effective and clearly documented assessment strategy [7 counts] aligned with awarding bodies' requirements
- use consistent grading schemes. Ensure moderation of assessment
- develop mechanisms for efficient and standardised feedback
- provide developmental feedback
- link learning outcomes, assessment tasks and grading criteria for clarity of grading procedures
- monitor student progress on the basis of assessment results
- comply with and respond to external examiners' suggestions
- develop virtual learning environment for assessment purposes
- implement plagiarism policy
- use plagiarism software.

Examples of recommendations:

develop a clear assessment strategy aligned with the awarding organisations' requirements [Advisable]

fully implement internal moderation procedures to provide consistency across all assessments [Advisable]

ensure that all staff rigorously operate the arrangements for written assessment feedback [Advisable]

monitor the quality of written feedback on students' assignments to ensure that it meets the requirements of its own policy [Advisable]

improve the speed of return, quality and consistency of feedback on student assignments [Desirable]

review current assessment criteria and develop clear links between learning outcomes, assessment tasks and grading criteria to ensure students are fully aware of how grades are awarded [Advisable]

review the clarity of its procedures for responding to plagiarism and ensure that they are fully understood by staff and students and applied consistently [Desirable]

extend the use of plagiarism software as a teaching tool to all courses to help develop students' referencing and writing skills [Desirable]

Topic area 3: Information

This topic area relates to information made available to the general public and prospective and current students, including aspects relating to the management and oversight of websites and virtual learning environments to maintain current, accurate and complete information, as well as aspects relating to version control.

Good practice (33 instances) focused on the availability of information in more than one language, the effective use of e-communications (website, virtual learning environment and social media) to engage with the general public, as well as staff and students, and effective policies and procedures for updating and maintaining information.

Examples of good practice:

the website facility for 'automatic translation' of English into more than 30 major languages is effective and helpful to international applicants [EThames Graduate School]

the engagement of the College with its students, using social media in ways that enhance their learning experience [Oxford Business College]

Recommendations highlighted the following actions to be implemented (there were seven essential recommendations in this area out of a total of 23 for all topic areas, 53 advisable and 53 desirable recommendations):

- ensure/review effectiveness of management of public information
- ensure processes in place for version control
- ensure appropriate management and oversight to maintain current, accurate and complete information, including in line with partnership agreements and other contractual arrangements
- increase accessibility of information
- provide appropriate links to awarding bodies/organisations
- proofread/review public information for correct and consistent use of English
- ensure consistency and accuracy of information provided by agents
- formalise and ensure processes in place for version control of quality assurance policies and procedures
- formalise arrangements for maintaining public information
- include students in the monitoring and evaluation of public information.

Examples of recommendations:

review procedures for the effective management of the accuracy and completeness of its public information [Essential]

ensure that there are systems in place to maintain version control of published policies and procedures, and to verify the accuracy of public information [Essential]

strengthen the generally effective arrangements for ensuring the accuracy of information by giving more attention to matters of important detail, including the accuracy of English in documentation and student notices [Desirable]

develop a formal method of collecting feedback on public information from students, staff and other stakeholders [Desirable]

Topic area 4: Student support

This topic area includes aspects relating to recruitment/induction, and academic and pastoral support. Good practice clearly outweighed the need for corrective action in this area. Review teams identified 85 features of good practice, and made one essential, five advisable and 22 desirable recommendations.

Good practice primarily related to pre-enrolment support, sometimes offered through well-informed and well-trained agents, as well as academic and pastoral support, offered by highly committed and accessible members of staff frequently in one-to-one tutorials.

Examples of good practice:

the close working relationship between students and staff engenders a positive and supportive environment focused on individual student needs, which adds value to their learning experience [Bradford College of Management]

the personal tutor scheme provides weekly group tutorials guided by a structured scheme of work which ensures consistency in students' access to support and guidance [London FoundationCampus]

the designation of a weekly 'guidance and assessment day' [Manchester College of Higher Education and Media Technology]

robust and effective processes underpin the selection, training and support of recruitment consultants, ensuring that the early information received by students is accurate and impartial [Cranford College]

comprehensive and rigorous agent training and monitoring ensures that students receive accurate and consistent information [London Foundation Campus]

The few recommendations that were made covered such actions as:

- include intercultural guidance
- formalise and extend tutorials.

Example of recommendations:

extend the system of regular tutorial review to all students [Desirable]

Topic area 5: Staff recruitment and development

Review teams reported 32 instances of good practice by noting that some providers fostered a teaching and learning culture with well qualified staff who were encouraged to undertake research activities and participate in developmental events. Providers monitored closely and planned effectively for staff development to enhance teaching practices and the learning experiences of students, often in the framework of an integrated staff development strategy.

Examples of good practice:

the introduction of staff seminars provides a facility for the highly qualified staff to develop their knowledge and share ideas and enhance learning and teaching for students [Christ the Redeemer College]

the encouragement given, and funding available, for staff development activities, particularly those involving research [Al-Maktoum College of Higher Education]

Recommendations for action (1 essential, 30 advisable and 86 desirable) revolved around the following needs:

- develop appropriate recruitment criteria to meet teaching needs and to align with policy
- provide appropriate staff induction
- provide staff with training opportunities in areas identified (use of virtual learning environment, dealing with plagiarism and academic misconduct, and so on)
- support staff to obtain teaching qualifications, if necessary
- support staff to engage with the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points
- support staff to share good practice
- develop a strategy for staff development, by consideration/integration of teaching observation, staff appraisal and continuous professional development schemes
- evaluate impact of staff development.

Examples of recommendations:

ensure that teaching appointments meet the School's recruitment policy and that staff are appropriately qualified for the teaching they undertake [Advisable]

implement a programme to support and develop staff understanding of and engagement with external reference points [Advisable]

introduce a more systematic approach to the identification and sharing of good practice [Desirable]

integrate staff appraisal, teaching observations and staff development plans [Desirable]
continue with plans to develop and fully implement the continuing professional development policy [Desirable]
introduce measures to identify key areas where staff development is needed and implement procedures for their accurate recording, monitoring and evaluation [Desirable]

Topic area 6: Resources

Some providers demonstrated particular care in ensuring that students had appropriate resources. The 12 instances of good practice revolved around the efficient management of resources and the timeliness of responses relating to resources. Notable were also instances where particularly user-friendly virtual learning environments were identified, containing relevant and comprehensive information. For distance and blended learning, integrated technology solutions proved to be greatly appreciated by review teams.

Examples of good practice:

effective management ensures that resources to support learning opportunities are highly specialised, robustly serviced, and developed by expert technicians [West Dean College - The Edward James Foundation]
the creative use of technology on the blended learning diploma provides high-quality materials and conferencing facilities [KLC School of Design]

In this area there were 13 advisable and 30 desirable recommendations by review teams, formulated as:

- monitor resources stock to ensure it meets students' needs [library/books]
- review accessibility of resources
- ensure there are online resources and develop the virtual learning environment
- make sure appropriate feedback mechanisms are in place for gathering feedback on resources.

Examples of recommendations:

progress its plans for the development of an e-portal [Desirable]
revise the student feedback questionnaire to ensure that student satisfaction levels can be measured for specific learning resources such as the library, computer facilities and teaching accommodation [Desirable]

Topic area 7: Collaboration with external bodies

This area relates to different means of collaboration with the industry and commerce, and levels of support from external/professional bodies.

Good practice (36 instances) included effective interaction between providers and awarding bodies/organisations, for example the support offered by awarding bodies/organisations through staff training initiatives and participation in committee structures, and the timely responsiveness on the part of the provider to awarding body/organisation recommendations.

Examples of good practice:

the highly effective system used to log all communications to and from the awarding body and organisations, which records actions taken and the College's responses, ensuring that all staff are kept well informed [Cranford College]
the establishment of a Professional Advisory Group ensures that programmes are informed by wider developments in the voluntary and statutory sectors and meet the required standards [International Christian College]

There were 11 advisable and 12 desirable recommendations for action in this area, formulated as:

- maintain appropriate communication with awarding bodies
- monitor effectiveness of implementation of recommendations by external bodies
- better attendance of awarding body/organisation representatives at provider's committee meetings
- (more) engagement/collaboration with professional bodies. Use reference points by professional bodies. Formalise input from industry
- ensure appropriate formal agreements are in place with all partners.

Examples of recommendations:

identify and apply reference points used by relevant professional, regulatory and statutory bodies to ensure the currency of academic standards [Advisable]

formalise input from industry experts to support the further development and enhancement of its higher education provision [Desirable]

Feedback from providers, reviewers, review coordinators

Following each review, reviewers, coordinators (REO only) and providers were asked to complete a questionnaire about their experiences of the process.

Across all respondent groups, responses given were mainly positive:

- 86 per cent of respondents across all three methods agreed the review achieved its aims
- 83 per cent of respondents thought communication throughout the review process was good
- 95 per cent of respondents thought the self-evaluation was useful
- over 95 per cent of reviewers and review coordinators thought the student submission was balanced and relevant
- 89 per cent of respondents agreed the action plan is useful
- 93 per cent of respondents agreed the report is useful to the provider.

The areas that received the least positive responses from reviewers and coordinators were the interaction with the facilitator and the documentation provided by the provider, from the self-evaluation and student submission, through to additional documentation at the review itself. For the providers, some felt that they were not kept sufficiently informed throughout the process; this was particularly true of providers undergoing RSEO.

Coordinators, reviewers and provider identified similar benefits of the process and similar challenges. Benefits noted were primarily the alignment of private providers to other UK higher education providers, the protection of students, and the opportunity the process gives for providers to reflect on quality-related issues. The primary challenges identified included using a 'one size fits all' model of review to look at both large and very small provision; the amount of time taken for the provider to prepare for the review; and getting the review team to understand the differences between privately funded provision and the types of provision they may be more used to reviewing. It was suggested by many respondents that the inclusion of a more developmental element in reviews would be an improvement to the process.

Main benefits of the EO process (selection of responses)

- It is an essential activity to protect [higher education] students and to ensure public confidence in UK HE. It gives clear advice to providers and sets clear expectations. [Reviewer]
- Opportunity by the College to obtain recognition for their processes, and, hence become more confident in their provision. [Coordinator]
- Caused us to thoroughly review our policies and procedures and benchmark against QAA and other standards for best practice. [Provider]
- The final report was a cause of pride amongst all of the staff. The action plan has given direction to the forthcoming months. [Provider]
- In many ways, however, it was in the preparing for the review that we gained the most benefit. [Provider]

Challenges of the process (selection of responses)

- Making sure that the provider understands this is a continuous process, rather than a one-off event, and motivating them to voluntarily continue to enhance the quality of its provision. [Reviewer]
- A challenge is for reviewers to recognise that while private provision is different it can also be, in some cases, better for students from overseas with the level of care and support given to students. [Reviewer]
- Keeping an open mind in view of where...providers are in quality journey compared to the public sector. [Coordinator]
- Staff and students having the confidence to give their views. [Coordinator]
- Explaining what we do and how we operate. Setting aside time for the process. [Provider]
- For a very small organisation like ours I think there is a danger that we are so busy managing quality that we get distracted from creating it in the first place. [Provider]

Suggestions for improvement (selection of responses)

- More detailed examination of the quality and academic standards of awarding bodies which sometimes strictly dictate the practices and standards of providers but offer little support, guidance or constructive feedback on assessment. [Reviewer]
- Give more advice to students on how to do [a written submission] and to colleges on how to select representative students for reviewers to meet. [Reviewer]
- Perhaps some additional guidance that makes clear that ownership of policies and procedures will be looked at. [Coordinator]
- Improved understanding of the production and structure of the [self-evaluation], referencing and use of supporting evidence. [Coordinator]
- I think it would be helpful to have stronger input from QAA in generating the Action Plan. [Provider]
- More contact with the Review Coordinator before submission of the Self-Evaluation [Provider]
- The review should also be concentrated on viability of the colleges - not only on financial viability, but other factors such as overall management and corporate governance. [Provider]

Useful links

Information from QAA about educational oversight:

www.qaa.ac.uk/educational-oversight

Review for Educational Oversight Handbook:

www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/REO-designated-providers-handbook-13.aspx

Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight Handbook:

www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/RSEO-Handbook-2013.aspx

Embedded College Review for Educational Oversight Handbook:

www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/embedded-college-handbook.aspx

Contact details

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

Southgate House

Southgate Street

Gloucester

GL1 1UB

Tel 01452 557098

Email enquiries@qaa.ac.uk

Web www.qaa.ac.uk

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