

For approval without discussion

**Quality Assurance Agency Annual Report 2014/15 and
Quality Assessment Review update**

Agenda: 12
HEFCW/16/06

Disclosable

22/01/2015

1 Issue

- 1.1 This paper attaches the final report of the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) on progress towards meeting the activities for 2014/15 as set out in the Service Level Agreement (SLA) between QAA, Universities Wales (formerly Higher Education Wales) and HEFCW. Council is invited to approve this report.

2 Corporate Planning Implications / Rationale for paper

- 2.1 Our Corporate Strategy notes that we deliver our statutory responsibilities for quality assessment through the Institutional Review: Wales reviews, which indicate that the quality and standards of provision at Welsh higher education institutions meet UK expectations. In addition, one of measures is '*All institutions being reviewed in the Corporate Strategy period to meet the UK thresholds for quality and standards in the QAA Institutional Review.*'

3 Recommendations

- 3.1 The Council is invited to:
- i. approve the final report of the QAA on progress towards meeting the activities for 2014/15 set out in the SLA;
 - ii. note the QAA programme of services for 2015/16;
 - iii. note the outcomes of the Quality Assessment Review consultation.

4 Timing for decisions

- 4.1 There are no timing implications for this paper.

5 Council members' interests

- 5.1 No conflicts of interests have been declared in advance of the meeting.

6 Further information

- 6.1 Dr Cliona O'Neill (tel 029 2068 2283; email: cliona.oneill@hefcw.ac.uk)

7 QAA Annual report 2014/15

- 7.1 **Annex A** presents the 2014/15 annual report of the QAA towards meeting the activities set out in the Service Level Agreement (SLA) between HEFCW, the QAA and Universities Wales. It reports on the achievement of QAA in delivering its programme of services in Wales and a breakdown of expenditure against the headings of the payment schedule for Wales for 2014/15. The report includes a rolling summary of QAA review outcomes. This includes highlighting where there were failings or limitations to provision, which have since been rectified. This will contribute to our annual governance assurance statement which we have to submit as advice to Welsh Government.
- 7.2 The Annual report was discussed at the first meeting of HEFCW's Quality Assessment Committee, chaired by Professor Leni Oglesby. Members were content with this report, and advised that it should be provided to Council (item 17, HEFCW/16/11 refers). The QAC advised that officers ask the QAA for a summary report on the review outcomes at the end of the SLA period. They also noted the indication that there were more access courses but fewer students. This was partly due to institutions developing their own foundation years, which might offer a more attractive proposition to students than access courses.

Council is invited to approve the final report of the QAA on progress towards meeting the activities for 2014/15 set out in the SLA.

8 QAA Programme of Services for 2015/16

- 8.1 The QAA programme of services for 2015/16, as agreed by the QAA, Universities Wales and HEFCW, is provided at **Annex B** for information.

Council is invited to note the QAA programme of services for 2015/16.

9 Future approaches to the assessment of quality in higher education

- 9.1 As noted at the November 2014 Council meeting (item HEFCW/14/88 refers), HEFCE, HEFCW and DELNI have been participating in a quality assessment review. This work is overseen by a steering group, which includes a HEFCW officer and the Chair of the QAC.
- 9.2 A discussion paper on high level principles was published, followed by a consultation on specific proposals. The outcomes of the consultation as a whole are available on the [HEFCE website](#), and the outcomes for Wales are available on our [website](#). These were considered by the Quality Assessment Review Steering Group at its meeting on 17 December 2015, and are also being provided to the Decisions on how to take the outcomes forward have been delayed, pending the outcomes of the BIS consultation, [Fulfilling our Potential: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice](#), as it is proposed that the Teaching Excellence Framework be aligned with future approaches to quality.

Council is invited to note the outcomes of the Quality Assessment Review consultation.

10 Financial implications

- 10.1 At its March 2014 meeting Council approved the cost to HEFCW for the QAA's services in 2014/15 as £260k, together with an additional sum of up to £100k for reviews of directly funded HE in FE (item HEFCW/15/14 refers). In fact the total cost

of the work was £253,061. Although the QAA did some preparatory work on establishing the reviews of directly funded HE in FE, the reviews will be carried out in 2015/16 and the cost will be applied to the SLA in that year.

11 Communications implications

- 11.1 There is press interest in the outcomes of reviews for individual institutions and their partners. There is continuing press coverage on the standards of higher education provision. The work of the QAA is therefore under scrutiny and is of interest to the press.
- 11.2 There is also extensive press interest in the QA Review consultation.

12 Diversity and Equal Opportunities implications

- 12.1 The QAA is required, under the terms and conditions of the SLA, to have an appropriate equal opportunities policy and take account of the requirements of the HEFCW Equality Scheme, seeking opportunities to promote equality in line with the requirements placed on the UK funding councils.
- 12.2 It is also required to meet the requirements of its own, HEIs' and the HEFCW Welsh Language Schemes, including ensuring that it establishes and maintains an appropriate organisational capacity in the Welsh language.

13 Risk Assessment

Risk	Action to address risk
The QAA does not deliver its services effectively.	HEFCW operate an SLA with the QAA and Universities Wales, and hold termly liaison meetings, in addition to annual Chief Executive meetings, which provide opportunities to discuss any issues and concerns as they arise.
Provision in Wales is of lower standard than that in the remainder of the UK.	We ask the QAA to keep us updated on developments internationally and in other countries of the UK, so that we can take account of them as they arise (eg revisions to the 'Concerns about standards and quality in higher education' scheme). We also have the ability to ask the QAA to carry out developmental/ thematic reviews and workshops as we deem appropriate.
If the QAA were not funded the Council would be less able to meet its statutory responsibilities with regard to quality under the HE (Wales) Act 2015.	Provision of funding to the QAA; discussion with the QAA regarding minimisation of costs. Formation of a Quality Assessment Committee to advise on HEFCW's statutory responsibilities and on enhancement issues. Consideration of other mechanisms to deliver statutory responsibilities through consultation on quality assessment.
Quality of teaching suffers in context of funding changes.	The QAA undertake institutional reviews and HEFCW has ongoing work with the QAA on review methods and developments.

