



## **Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers): guidance for facilitators**

Paragraphs 33-35 and Annex 4 of the Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) Handbook describe the role of the facilitator, what knowledge and skills the facilitator needs to have, and the protocols the facilitator should follow. This document provides further detail on the role of the facilitator at each stage of the review process.

### **Before the visit**

#### **Briefing event**

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) provides a briefing for facilitators and lead student representatives (LSRs) on their roles and responsibilities in Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers). The briefing provides an opportunity for attendees to discuss how they might approach their respective roles with QAA and with counterparts from other providers.

#### **After the briefing event**

You are welcome to telephone or email the QAA Review Manager coordinating your review, or visit him or her at QAA, if you have any questions about the review process. The Review Manager can provide advice about the review process, but cannot act as a consultant for your preparation for review, or comment on whether your quality assurance processes meet the Expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education: that is the job of the review team.

### **The preparatory meeting**

#### **What is it and what will happen?**

The preparatory meeting takes place approximately 18 weeks before the review visit. The purpose of the meeting is:

- to answer any questions about the review that remain after the briefing
- to agree the information you are going to provide to the review team
- to discuss the information QAA has assembled from other sources
- to confirm the practical arrangements for the review visit.

Further information about the preparatory meeting is in paragraphs 57-62 of the Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) Handbook.

#### **Who should attend?**

The meeting should involve those who are most immediately involved with the production of the self-evaluation document and the student submission, including the facilitator and LSR. Attendance by other staff should be confined to those with responsibility for the operational arrangements for the review. The Review Manager can give you further guidance about who should attend.

## **What to do before the preparatory meeting?**

- Ensure you have studied the Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) Handbook and the online briefing materials before the preparatory meeting, and have contacted the Review Manager if any additional clarification is required.
- In consultation with the Review Manager and the LSR, fix the date of the preparatory meeting well in advance, allowing plenty of time for arrangements at the provider to be finalised. The date chosen should be considered carefully to facilitate the participation of staff and students. The meeting may be conducted virtually or at the provider.
- Where applicable, discuss possible attendance at the preparatory meeting by representatives of awarding bodies.
- As early as possible, in collaboration with the LSR, consider the arrangements for ensuring appropriate student attendance.
- Give preliminary consideration to the organisation of the review visit to inform discussions with the Review Manager, especially on the timing of meetings with students and employers.
- Brief other attendees about the nature of Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) before the preparatory meeting.

## **Document upload: the self-evaluation document and student submission**

After the preparatory meeting, you will have around six weeks to upload your provider's self-evaluation document and accompanying evidence to the secure electronic folder. This deadline also applies to the student submission. How you do this will be explained to you by your Review Manager at the preparatory meeting. There is technical guidance included in Annex 3 of the Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) Handbook and practical instructions will also be provided by your QAA Review Support Administrator.

## **Additional evidence**

Nine weeks before the review visit the Review Manager will inform you of any additional information requested by the review team following their analysis of the self-evaluation document and the student submission. This will be limited to information that the team requires to finish the desk-based analysis. Any additional information will need to be provided at least six weeks before the review visit.

## **First team meeting**

About four weeks before the review visit the review team will meet to discuss its analysis of the documentary evidence, decide on issues for further exploration during the review visit, decide on whether it requires further evidence, and to agree the length and proposed structure of the visit. Although the facilitator will not be involved with the meeting, the Review Manager will contact you soon afterwards to tell you of the duration of the visit, the team's main lines of enquiry, whom the team wishes to meet, and any further requests for documentary evidence. This will help you to plan for the review visit.

## **After the first team meeting**

The facilitator is the primary contact for the Review Manager during the preparations for the review and should oversee all preparations. Once the visit timetable has been agreed, the facilitator is responsible for:

- agreeing with the Review Manager the arrangements for providing any additional information requested by the team
- taking care that you fully understand the review visit timetable
- disseminating the timetable for the review visit to colleagues
- working with the LSR to ensure that the student representative body is informed of, and understands, the progress of the review
- briefing all participants on their roles within the review, including times when they need to attend meetings and other review visit activities
- making arrangements to ensure you are available throughout the review visit.

Specific preparations for the review visit may include:

- providing a briefing for colleagues
- working with the LSR to provide a briefing for students
- liaising with awarding bodies/awarding organisations about the details of their contribution (as appropriate)
- deciding who should attend meetings with reviewers
- arranging rooms and other facilities, including internet access and refreshments
- ensuring that all relevant documentation is readily available, as agreed with the Review Manager.

## **The review visit**

### **Overview of the visit**

The review team will normally arrive at its accommodation on the evening before the review is due to start. Review activity will, therefore, begin first thing on day one of the review. You will be familiar with the programme for the review by this time.

The programme of activity will extend from one day to a maximum of five days. The activity carried out at the visit will not be the same for every review but may include meetings with staff, external examiners, awarding body/organisation staff, recent graduates and employers. The review team will ensure that its programme includes meetings with a wide variety of students, to enable it to gain first-hand information on students' experience as learners and on their engagement with the provider's quality assurance and enhancement processes.

Activities at the provider will be carried out by at least two review team members, although it is envisaged that most activities will involve the whole review team. Where the team splits for an activity, there will be catch-up time afterwards so that all members of the team have a shared understanding of what has been found.

The facilitator and LSR will be invited to contribute to the review visit and their involvement will have been discussed at the preparatory meeting. The facilitator and LSR will not be present with the team for its private meetings. We expect the review team to have regular contact with the facilitator and LSR, perhaps at the beginning and end of the day, or when they are invited to clarify evidence or provide information. The facilitator and LSR can also suggest informal meetings if they want to alert the team to information which it might find useful.

### **What might you do?**

In advance of the review visit:

- help staff prepare for meetings by clarifying their role and nature
- ensure that the room used for the meeting is suitable - the review team will decide

- how it wants the seating to be arranged and will want to be in the room before the staff and student participants arrive
- as facilitator, you can normally observe any of the team's meeting with staff (but not with students)
  - if you have a leading role in the provider's management of higher education, you may need to make a contribution to the meeting in that role - if so, make it clear that you are speaking in this role and not as the facilitator.

After meetings, the review team will meet to confirm what it has just heard. You will not be present at this meeting.

You may find it useful to refer back to the guidance in Annex 4 of the Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) Handbook, which details the responsibilities of the facilitator.

### **Final meeting between review team and the higher education provider**

The programme will include a final meeting between the team and senior staff of the provider, the facilitator and the LSR. This will not be a feedback meeting, but will be an opportunity for the review team to summarise the major themes and issues that it has pursued (and may still be pursuing). The intention will be to give the provider a final opportunity to offer clarification and/or present evidence that will help the review team come to secure review findings.

### **Final day**

On the final day of the review visit, the review team considers its findings in order to:

- decide on the four judgments
- agree the features of good practice that it wishes to highlight
- agree recommendations for action by the provider
- agree affirmations.

You can find more detail about the factors that teams use to make judgments in the Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) Handbook.

Please note that the facilitator and LSR are not involved in these discussions and the review team will not report back at the end of the day. There is no oral feedback on the proposed outcomes. Instead, two weeks after the end of the review, a letter setting out the provisional key findings will be sent to the provider and to the Home Office and/or Higher Education Funding Council for England (and the provider's awarding body/bodies/organisation(s) where applicable).

### **After the visit**

You will continue to have an important role to play as a channel of communication between the provider and the review team. You are likely to see a pre-publication draft of the report when it is sent to the provider and may be involved in preparing the provider's response and/or in producing their action plan - see paragraphs 94-95 and Annex 11 of the Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) Handbook for further information on the action plan.

