

Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers)



Survival Guide for Lead Student Representatives

**All You Need to Know about Higher Education Review
(Alternative Providers)**

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Introduction

This guidance was written to provide lead student representatives (LSRs) with information about the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's (QAA's) Higher Education Review, in place from 2013, and has been adapted for the Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) method, in place from 2015. The guidance provides an overview of the review process including specific guidance about the role of the LSR. The review process aims to place students' interests at its heart, and as such the **role of LSR is a very important one**.

How to use this guidance

We recommend reading this guidance fully as it has been designed with students in mind. We hope you'll find it useful, but you should remember that the definitive manual for Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) is QAA's *Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers): A Handbook for Providers*, which should always be taken as the ultimate authority for how reviews will be carried out. We haven't gone into too much detail about the background information - you'll get all that from QAA briefing events and the Handbook. Instead, we've focused on your role as a student representative (student rep). We've also included tips from LSRs who have been through a review before - they share their ideas and best practice so you can learn from them.

We've split this guidance down into three colour coded sections: Build up to the review, During the review and After the review, with a checklist so you know exactly what you should do and when. All the key terms are also available in the 'ultimate jargon buster' section at the back of this guidance for easy reference - it may look like a foreign language at times, so we've tried to simplify it.

This guide might not be the lightest read, but it's pretty crucial if you want to do a good job as LSR. We think that you will find the role rewarding, and you never know, you might enjoy it - happy reading!

Who are QAA?

All universities and colleges that provide higher education in the UK are independent. However, most receive government funding in one form or another. Alternative providers of higher education in the UK, while not in receipt of government funding, do in some cases have specific course designation, which enables students to access funding or require Tier 4 status (to offer provision for international students).

QAA is an organisation that is independent of both government and of higher education providers. We visit providers to review how well they are fulfilling their responsibilities for the quality and standards of the higher education they provide.

When we talk about quality and standards, we aren't talking about your exam results, what the sports facilities are like or what the graduate employability rates are. Standards and quality in this sense means things such as the level that you are being taught at, the feedback on your work, student support with personal tutors, how the student voice is listened to, and information published about your course. Check out the jargon buster in Annex 1 for more information.

What is the purpose of Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers)?

Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) looks at the way providers manage their responsibilities for the standards and quality of the higher education they offer. Providers need to successfully pass a review such as Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) if they aim to:

- recruit students from outside of the European Economic Area (EEA) - this means they need to have an educational oversight inspection in order to obtain/maintain what is known as a Tier 4 Sponsor Licence
- enable students residing in England to access student support funded by the Department for Education via the Student Loans Company.

Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) is carried out by peer reviewers - staff and students from other higher education providers. The reviewers are guided by a set of UK Expectations about the provision of higher education, which are contained in the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code).

The overall aim of Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) is to inform students and the wider public as to whether a provider:

- sets and/or maintains UK-agreed academic standards for its higher education awards
- provides opportunities that allow students to achieve those higher education awards and qualifications
- provides accessible, trustworthy and accurate information for the general public, prospective students, current students and graduates
- plans effectively to constantly improve its higher education provision.

Stages of review

In a nutshell, the main bulk of the review work can be divided into three stages:

1 Before the review

All the higher education providers who are due to be reviewed in the next year attend a briefing event led by QAA to find out more about the process, which you'll be invited to through your provider (for example, your university, college or school).

Your higher education provider will be working hard to bring together evidence and documents to show how they meet the UK expectations. This evidence can be anything from minutes of meetings, to examples of reports, to survey data.

After gathering all the evidence, your higher education provider will bring it all together into the self-evaluation document. This, along with your student submission, will be sent to the review team who will visit your provider.

There will also be a preparatory meeting before the review visit itself, which you can join; this deals with practical arrangements for the visit and provides an opportunity to ask questions in relation to the review.

2 During the review visit

The review visit can be anything from one to five days long, depending on progress since the last QAA review and what the provider and students have told us about the current situation. The review team will visit your provider to have meetings with staff, students and employers, and look in more detail at what was presented to them in the student submission and the self-evaluation document. They use all information provided to reach final judgements. During the review visit the review team will want to meet with the Facilitator and the LSR from time to time.

3 After the review

Once everything has been signed off, QAA will publish a final review report on its website where it is available to the public.

There will also be an internal action plan from your provider, which will address some of the outcomes of the review process. QAA expect this to be made publicly available.

That's all we are really going to say about the review process. You'll hear it all in more detail at review briefings and can read more in the method handbook. What we're going to focus on next is your role at each stage. We've included a checklist at the end of each section so you know that you are on the right track.



Section 1: Build-up to the review

So by now you hopefully know a little bit more about Higher Education Review and are ready to take the plunge to start getting ready for the review. In this section, we will cover what goes in to the student submission, an introduction to the online tool for gaining student opinion, and a checklist so you can be sure you've done all you need to:

A - Some key definitions

B - The Preparatory Meeting

C - Your student submission

D - Online tool

E - Checklist

A - Some key definitions

We won't beat about the bush, it's not all sunshine and buttercups - there are some key definitions it's worth getting your head around. Not just because you'll need to be familiar with them for the review, but also because you'll need to explain what they mean to students.

When I first became an LSR, everyone spoke in this jargon of phrases like 'academic standards' and 'quality' at the briefing event and in the handbook. I had no idea what they meant! Don't worry, because QAA give you a jargon buster so you can keep up. It did make me realise though that it is part of my job as LSR to translate all these phrases for students. So in the student submission I didn't talk about 'learning opportunities' but instead about library facilities, online access and personal tutors. It really isn't as daunting as it first seems!

Interview with Samantha Gill, LSR

Here goes:

Academic standards	Standards are the level of achievement that a student has to reach to gain an academic award (for example, a degree). For similar awards, the threshold level of achievement should be the same across the UK.
Standards/ Threshold standards	For example, this means that an engineering degree from one university reaches the same level as it does in another university. Academic standards is one of the judgement areas in Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers).

Learning opportunities	Learning opportunities are everything a higher education provider offers order to enable a student to achieve the level required to qualify for an award.
Quality (of Learning opportunities)	Learning opportunities include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the teaching that students receive on their courses or programmes of study• the contribution students make to their own learning• the academic and personal support students receive which enable them to progress through their courses• access to libraries• access to online resources or a virtual learning environment. Learning opportunities is one of the judgement areas in Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers).

Information

Information about learning opportunities

This is information about learning opportunities being available and fit for purpose. This information is mostly for the public but includes current students, graduates and those responsible for quality assurance. Information is one of the judgement areas in Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers).

Enhancement

Improvement

This is taking deliberate steps at higher education provider (for example, university, college or school) level to improve the quality of learning opportunities. This definition means that enhancement is more than a collection of examples of good practice. It is about a provider being aware that it has a responsibility to improve the quality of learning opportunities, and having policies, structures and processes to make sure that it can detect where improvement is necessary - and where a need to improve is detected, that something will be done about it.

Enhancement is one of the judgement areas in Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers).

The UK Quality Code for Higher Education

The Quality Code

What is it?

The Quality Code is a series of documents put together by QAA, with input from universities, colleges and students across the UK. These documents are split into three Parts.

Part A is about academic standards.

Part B is about learning opportunities.

Part C is about information about higher education provision.

The Quality Code sets out what everyone in the UK higher education sector requires of each other in those three areas.

The Quality Code applies to all students in UK higher education that is reviewed by QAA.

How does it work?

Each section of the Quality Code has an Expectation. This Expectation describes what all providers going through QAA review are required to show they meet.

Under each Expectation there are a number of Indicators. These are there to help you and your provider determine how you are meeting the Expectation.

What does this mean to you?

In your role as an LSR you are most likely to refer to the documents in Part B and Part C. So, in your student submission if you wanted to talk about how good the teaching is at your provider, you would look at the Expectation and Indicators in *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*.

To access all of the Quality Code documents, just visit QAA's website.

Indicators

What higher education providers expect of themselves and of each other, and what students and the wider public can therefore expect of them.

B - The preparatory meeting

About 18 weeks before your review visit, you'll be invited to be part of the **preparatory meeting**.

This is an opportunity for QAA staff coordinating the review to meet key staff involved in writing the self-evaluation document and you, as the LSR. The aim of this meeting is:

- to answer any questions about the review which remain after the briefing
- to discuss the information QAA has assembled from other sources
- to confirm the practical arrangements for the review visit.

This is your chance to chat to QAA staff about the student involvement in the review.

As LSR, you're responsible for helping select students to meet the review team (more about this later on). This is also a good opportunity to ask any final questions about the student submission or any part of the review, before the review visit itself takes place. From the point of the preparatory meeting onwards, you'll have six weeks before the student submission is due.

C - Your student submission

Each QAA review method incorporates a student submission to tell the review team what it is like to be a student at your provider. This student submission normally takes the form of a written document but it can be a video, presentation, or a combination of all! See Annex 2 at the back of this document for more information on alternative student submissions.

Thought point

Fill in the key dates for your review in the table below. You should be able to find these out from your review briefing at QAA or from your staff contact in your higher education provider.

Key milestone	Date	Notes
Review briefing at QAA		
Preparatory meeting		
Student submission due to be uploaded		
Review visit		
Draft report sent to my provider		
Action Plan published		

Where do I begin writing the student submission?

There is no right or wrong answer in how to prepare a student submission. Our suggestion would be to first read through all the guidance and attend the QAA briefing. There are certain areas that the review team will be particularly interested in hearing about. These are: academic standards, learning opportunities, enhancement, and information and enhancement. Check out the jargon buster for what these areas mean.

It's always best to base anything you say in the student submission on evidence. That way it isn't just your opinion. Have a look at any surveys or data from previous years - do students feel particularly strongly about particular issues or areas?

We've provided an optional template that might get you thinking about what your student submission could talk about in Annex 3. Check that out for more ideas.

It would also be helpful to speak to the person (probably the facilitator) working on the self-evaluation document at your higher education provider. For example, if he or she talks about feedback on students' work in the provider's own submission, you might also want to write about any survey results that show students' thoughts on the quality of feedback they receive.

Where do I get the evidence to base all the information in the student submission on?

As we've already said, your student submission should be based on more than just a few students' opinions. Using survey data and lots of student opinion is a great way to give your student submission credibility.

Sources of evidence

- Meeting minutes
- Internal student feedback data
- Course reps focus groups
- Surveys
- Opinion polls
- Outcomes of students' union campaigns
- National Student Survey data
- Postgraduate taught/research experience surveys
- Any previous student submissions from previous reviews

Instead of you doing your own surveys or gathering your own data, your higher education provider will undoubtedly have lots of data collected over many years to gain student feedback. Speak to your facilitator about any recent surveys of student opinion or staff-student committee reports, and so on. These shouldn't be too hard to come by as they will be using the same data to base their self-evaluation document on and they should be happy to share it with you.

Who can help me?

So you've got a rough idea of what you plan on writing, but when it actually comes to putting pen to paper you're stuck. We suggest looking at Annex 3 for some questions that might prompt you. Your higher education provider facilitator, who is the staff representative for the review, should be able to help you.

Thought point

Who are the key people you need to get involved in writing the student submission? Are they key people who will help? Should you ask for volunteers? Jot down your thoughts here.

How long is this actually going to take me to write?

Each student submission is unique to each provider and they can range from being two pages to 50 pages long depending on what you want to say. We can't set an absolute time or length.

The only point we'd make is to ensure that it covers the main key areas of Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) as a minimum. There's no need to include unnecessary detail. Remember – less is more!

Will my higher education provider want to read it?

Yes, most probably. They will want to read the final student submission and may have a comment or two to make. They may also be able to offer guidance or additional evidence for certain points.

Your provider should not be able to change the content of the student submission. This is a student-led document, and although it can be written with support of the staff, it should not be altered by them except for factual accuracy.

6 When I first showed my university the student submission, they had some really positive things to say. The staff were very keen to read it and hear the student side. They were able to provide me with some evidence I needed to back up my point about feedback on work and also helped me with the structure. There was one point that they didn't want me to include because they didn't feel it was in the scope of the review, but when I showed them the evidence and explained, they agreed it was important to incorporate it. So they didn't alter anything I'd said – just provided some helpful guidance and feedback.

Interview with Tom Chance, LSR

What if it says something my higher education provider doesn't like?

The student submission should be about the positives and the negatives of student opinion to present an all-round picture. This will mean that it may highlight something which your provider may not like you to highlight. As long as you have the evidence to back up your point and it is relevant to the review areas, you have every right to include the point in question.

Will other students want to see it?

Most probably – student reps especially. Lots of providers post their student submission online so all students can see what it is about. You don't have to, but it is a good way to show students their involvement and what the review is all about.

Any students who will meet the review team during the review visit should certainly be familiar with the student submission.

How do I send the student submission to the review team once it is finished?

Your provider facilitator will upload the final document to QAA's secure site, which only the review team have access to.

What will the review team actually do with the student submission?

The review team use the student submission to gain student viewpoints on your higher education provider. For each point made, they will look at the evidence behind it. They'll also compare the student submission to the self-evaluation document from your provider.

The review team use what is written in the student submission as a base for areas to look at in more detail during the actual review visit. So for example, if in your student submission you have said that all students are happy with the access to libraries on campus, the review team will ask this question when meeting students on the review visit. This way, the review team gets the whole picture and doesn't just hear about something from one perspective.

D - Online tool

You may have heard whisperings about an online tool for gathering student opinion. We shall explain.

This online tool is, in the simplest terms, an online webpage where any student at a higher education provider undergoing QAA review can input their opinion or viewpoint about their experience. It is another way of the review team gaining student feedback and opinion.

This online tool will not be used in every review. It will only be used in certain circumstances where it has not been possible, for whatever reason, to have a student submission or a meeting with students during the review visits. For example:

- it may not be possible to write a student submission or identify a LSR
- students may be distance learners who could not meet the review team on campus
- there may be no established other ways of gaining student opinion in the higher education provider.

If the online tool is going to be used in your review, your provider facilitator will liaise with QAA. More information will be provided if the online tool is going to be used.

E - Checklist

Tick off the checklist to make sure you're on track and have achieved all you need to before the review begins.

- Attend QAA briefing on review.
- Meet my higher education provider staff facilitator, ideally before the preparatory meeting.
- Have a basic understanding of the review process and what it involves.
- Make a plan for the student submission and collate any evidence needed.
- Attend the preparatory meeting meeting (this may be in person or could be a virtual meeting).
- Let students know the review is happening, especially student reps.
- Share the final version of the student submission with the provider facilitator to keep them informed and for them to upload to QAA's database.
- If appropriate, share the student submission with the student body.
- Start to think about the next stage, the review visit itself.



Section 2: During the review

By now your student submission should be uploaded safe and sound. Your higher education provider will have done the bulk of the work for the review and they will be preparing for the actual review visit itself. In this section, we will cover:

A - Briefing students

B - The review meetings

C - Checklist so you can be sure you've done all you need to.

A - Briefing students

Student reps

Student reps come in all shapes and sizes. A key part of your role is to keep students informed about the review and how they can feed into the process. Student reps are some of the key students who should know and be comfortable with QAA reviews. As LSR, it isn't possible for you to be everywhere and engage with every student. Student reps can help spread the message about the review and pass on any feedback. You could inform the wider student body about the review through a mass email, a factsheet on the students' union (or equivalent) website, or perhaps through the provider intranet or virtual learning environment. You may allow students to send any comments, questions or concerns they may have to your student rep.

6 Using my student rep network was crucial to communicating all about the review. I couldn't be everywhere speaking to all students, so by educating my student reps, I made sure the message about the review was reaching more students. I made sure all my reps were made aware at the start of the academic year in our training for course reps. That was so they could all ask questions and hear the answers together. Student reps were invaluable to my role as LSR - I couldn't have done it without them!

Interview with Will Farron, LSR

Thought point

Which key groups do you think will need to know about the review? How will you tell them? Jot down your thoughts here.

Make sure your student reps are fully in the know by working with your higher education provider to tell them all about QAA. We've got some really handy animations that can help with this; search QAATube and check them out - they are easy to send round and explain things really clearly.

You can also provide your student reps with a copy of your student submission.

B - Review meetings

As LSR you, alongside the staff facilitator, are one of the key people the review team will meet with regularly throughout the review visit. The review team will be at your higher education provider for one to five days depending on the size of provision. You'll probably meet the review team once a day, if possible and depending on your studies, to answer any of their general questions and simply be the student rep. Sometimes the review team might have something specific for you, other times it will simply be a quick chat to make sure everyone is happy with the review progress. You'll be given a full review timetable well in advance so it will be clear exactly when you are expected to be around. Feel free to ask the review team any questions.

As LSR, it is your responsibility to select students to attend the review meetings. In the past, the higher education provider chose students to attend these meetings, but in the interests of fairness this responsibility has been passed on to the LSR.

You'll be given a time or a date for any meetings with students in advance.

How do I go about choosing students?

Your first port of call should be those ever-trusty student reps! Send out an email to ask for volunteers to attend the meeting. The higher education provider might send this out on your behalf if you cannot email them directly.

How many students will the review team want to meet?

It depends on the size of your provider - usually up to about 10 students. If there are more than this it gets hard to ensure that everyone can have their say. However the review team are always happy to speak to students so if you have 12 really keen students, that's fine, but it is important that they are broadly representative of the HE students at your higher education provider if possible.

What sort of criteria should I take into account?

You should bear in mind that the review team will want to speak to a variety of students from across the provider. For example, if you only have first-year students, it will be hard for the review team to gain a full picture of life for undergraduate and postgraduate students. When selecting students you should ensure a variety across:

- year of study
- higher education course
- male and female
- postgraduate and undergraduate students (if applicable)
- international students
- student reps and non-student reps.

Do I attend the student meeting?

This is up to you! You'll meet the review team a few times throughout the review so you will have every opportunity to have your say. If you'd like to also attend the student meeting, you'd be more than welcome.

How do I prepare students for the meeting?

We recommend making sure students have a good understanding of the review process and their role in it. We would also recommend they have seen the student submission and are familiar with it. It might also be helpful to remind them that QAA cannot deal with individual gripes about individual cases or individual members of staff.

This student meeting is kept private so individual comments will not be revealed to staff at your higher education provider – students can speak in private knowing that everything is said in confidence.

What will the review team ask students in the meeting?

Again, each meeting will be unique to each higher education provider so there is no definite answer. The review team will all introduce themselves and check that the students all know why they are there. They will also ask all the students to introduce themselves.

After this, the review team are likely to go into more detailed questions about topics to do with the student submission. For example, they might ask whether all the students are happy with the feedback on their work or that they know where to go if they wanted to make a complaint. It won't be anything scary and remember, the discussions at meetings with the team are confidential – no information in the final report will identify individual students or their views, and those individual views won't be passed on to anyone else.

As LSR, I sat in on the student meeting with the review team. They were so friendly and made sure all students knew anything they said would be in confidence. They were also really careful to not use jargon or ask questions students wouldn't know the answer to. It felt more like a chat than an actual meeting.

Interview with Kerry Jones, LSR

C - Checklist

Tick off the checklist to make sure you're on track.

- Contact all students and student reps asking for volunteers to attend the review briefing.
- Brief all student reps on QAA review and ensure they have access to the student submission.
- Make sure the student meeting has a good variation of different types of students.
- Send the final list of chosen students to the university or college facilitator.
- Attend the review meetings as appropriate.



Section 3: After the review

The review team have been and gone in a whirlwind and there is a lull in review work from your higher education provider. They'll be waiting for the final report to be written by the review team and for the next steps. In this section, we will cover:

A - The report and its outcomes

B - Action plan

C - Continuing on the good work after the review

D - Final checklist so you can be sure you've done all you need to.

A - Report and outcomes

What does the report actually do?

The report is a summary of all the review team have found throughout the review. It includes a commentary on each section of the review and examples of evidence. The report is essentially the end product of all the work done by the higher education provider to demonstrate to the review team that they meet the right standards.

In this report, the review team will highlight any features that they think are good practice. They'll also make any recommendations for areas which need to be worked on by your higher education provider. The main part of the report are the four judgement areas which are the focus of any review. The report will make clear if your provider meets UK expectations in these areas:

- academic standards
- learning opportunities
- information
- enhancement.

If your higher education provider has done especially well in learning opportunities, information or enhancement they will be noted as being commended in that area.

If the judgement area is not deemed to be good enough, a judgement will read 'Does not meet UK expectations' or 'Requires improvement to meet UK expectations'.

What do the judgements actually mean?

What happens if any outcomes are negative?

The judgements are a quick way for anyone to see how your higher education provider has done in its review. Your provider needs to get judgements of 'commended' or 'meets UK expectations' to successfully complete its review. If any of the judgements are negative, your provider will be required to work on these areas, which might involve you. It doesn't mean the provider will be shut down. It doesn't mean that lectures will stop or that you'll notice any visible difference on campus. The provider will usually be able to apply for another review and have a second chance to make improvements that ensure it does meet the required standards.

How long will the report be published after a review visit?

Roughly six weeks after your review visit, QAA will send a draft report to your higher education provider. Twelve weeks after the review visit, a final public version of the report will be published on QAA's website.

Can my higher education provider challenge anything said in the report?

Your provider can challenge anything in the report if it is a challenge to do with factual accuracy. They will have this opportunity when they see the draft report. You should also get the opportunity to comment on the draft report.

Should I do anything with this report?

It's up to you. When it is published, your higher education provider will post it on their website, as will QAA. You might want to direct students to it. There will be certain sections of the report which are useful and relevant to students. After a successful review, each higher education provider will be able to display the QAA Quality Mark or Review Graphic.

Thought point

How will you share the outcomes of the review? Which students will want to know the outcomes? Jot down your thoughts here.

B - Action plan

Your higher education provider will develop an action plan soon after QAA publishes the report: they should either do this jointly with you as student reps, or allow you to provide a commentary on the action plan.

How can I gain feedback on the action plan?

You could collect opinions of groups of students about the suitability of recommended actions: for example, if a recommendation was made about the provision of placements, you might like to contact placement students to check that the suggested action will address the identified problem.

C - Continuing on the good work

If you choose, the student submission can be the start of an ongoing process for your students' union (or its equivalent): it's a large piece of research that could kick-start a new campaign, or set objectives for the student body over the coming years. You could also produce an annual quality report following up on the issues raised in the student submission and showing what the higher education provider has done about them. This way, the review feeds into ongoing improvements within your provider.

6 My university were really supportive of the student submission. So much so, that they wanted us to write one every year! We're going to use the student submission we used as a base, updating it each year to show progress. We're also going to expand it slightly to include non-academic areas. Hopefully this way we can have a solid base to build on next time a QAA review comes round.

Interview with Claire Holley, LSR

Skills gained by being a LSR

There's an awful lot you can be proud of for achieving by being a LSR - it's not an easy job! Make sure you are aware of some of the skills you will have undoubtedly gained throughout the process, such as:

- time management - a volunteer role on top of your higher education course can't be easy
- people management - organising all those students to attend meetings
- research, editing and writing skills - forget essays, the student submission takes the biscuit!

Thought point

What other key skills do you think you developed through your role as LSR? Can you demonstrate them? Jot down your thoughts here.

D - Final checklist

Congratulations - you've reached the end of a QAA review! Tick off the checklist below and give yourself a pat on the back.

- Read the draft report.
- Comment on the action plan and feed in any student feedback.
- Make students aware of the final report and action plan.
- Pass on any work to future LSRs.

Annex 1: Ultimate jargon buster

Assurance	the process for checking the standards and quality of the education provided against agreed benchmarks.
Awarding body	an organisation that awards an educational qualification, following formal assessment; this includes bodies that certify professional competence.
Enhancement of quality	taking deliberate steps at provider level to improve the quality of learning opportunities. This definition means that enhancement is more than a collection of examples of good practice: it is about a higher education provider being aware that it has a responsibility to improve the quality of learning opportunities, and having policies, structures and processes to make sure that it can detect where improvement is necessary – and where a need to improve is detected, that something will be done about it.
Facilitator	the lead contact at your provider for the review process. Normally coordinates the self-evaluation document, organises the review visit and other meetings, and maintains regular contact with QAA and the LSR.
Good practice	process or way of working that, in the view of the QAA review team, makes a particularly positive contribution to judgement areas.
HEFCE	the Higher Education Funding Council for England promotes and funds teaching and research in universities and colleges in England. It distributes public money from the government.
Judgements	four headline statements outlining the review team's findings. There are three possible judgements on standards ('meets', 'requires improvement to meet' or 'does not meet' UK expectations) and four possible judgements on quality, information and enhancement ('commended', 'meets', 'requires improvement to meet' or 'does not meet UK expectations'). All judgements are required to be either 'meets UK expectations' or 'commended' before QAA will sign off the review.
Peer review	a process of review conducted by people with current or very recent experience of the activity being reviewed (in this case, providing or assessing higher education).
Quality Code	the UK Quality Code for Higher Education: a document containing the core reference points used for setting, maintaining and assuring standards and quality in higher education.
Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers)	a process of peer review whereby each higher education provider is usually visited for a full review once every four years. The purpose is to assure the public, including current and prospective students, of the robustness of the provider's management of quality and standards, the completeness of its public information and its commitment to enhancement. Following the first review, providers will submit an annual return and will receive monitoring visits each year before the next full review. Providers who do not pass the monitoring process may request a further review in order to maintain educational oversight or specific course designation.

Lead student representative (LSR)	lead contact on behalf of the student body during the review process. Normally coordinates the student submission and facilitates student engagement with the review.
Learning opportunities	everything a higher education provider offers provides in order to enable a student to achieve the level required to qualify for an award. Learning opportunities include the teaching that students receive on their courses or programmes of study, and the contribution students make to their own learning, as well as the academic and personal support they receive which enable them to progress through their courses. Learning resources (like IT or libraries), admissions policies, student support and staff development for the teaching role all contribute to the quality of learning opportunities, just as much as the content of the actual course or programme. We use the term 'learning opportunities' rather than 'learning experience' because, while we consider that a provider should be capable of guaranteeing the quality of the opportunities it offers, it cannot guarantee how any particular student will experience those opportunities.
Information	a judgement will be made about the completeness and trustworthiness of a higher education provider's information.
Quality	a way of describing how well the learning opportunities available to students are managed to help students to achieve their award. It is about making sure that appropriate and effective teaching, support, assessment and learning opportunities are provided for them.
Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA)	an organisation that is independent of both government and higher education providers. We report on quality assurance by visiting providers to review how well they are fulfilling their responsibilities. We also offer guidance on maintaining and improving standards and quality and on developing course delivery through the Quality Code.
Self-evaluation document	a document prepared by the higher education provider to a given template, used as the starting point for review teams' investigations. It provides the provider's perspective on its management of quality and standards, provision of learning opportunities, information and enhancement.
Standards	the level of achievement that a student has to reach to gain an academic award (for example, a degree). For similar awards, the threshold level of achievement should be the same across the UK. Also referred to as 'threshold standards'.
Student submission	a document prepared on behalf of the student body, usually overseen by the LSR. The student submission gives the students' perspective on the provider's management of quality and standards, provision of learning opportunities, information and enhancement.
Threshold standards	the level of achievement that a student has to reach to gain an award. Threshold standards only describe the basic pass level: they do not relate to any individual degree classification in any particular subject (for example, a 2:1 in Physics). They dictate the standard required to be able to label an award 'bachelor's' or 'master's'.

Annex 2: Alternative student submissions

Each QAA review method incorporates a student submission to show the review team the student experience at that individual higher education provider. These student submissions are traditionally written and give the review team ideas for areas to look into during the review. QAA accepts that it may be easier and more accessible for student submissions to take another form such as a podcast, video or interviews. This guidance should provide clarity to those who wish to provide non-written student submissions for QAA reviews.

Please note: This guidance is not the complete guide on how to write a student submission. This should be used in conjunction with the detail given earlier on in this guidance which details evidence sources and student involvement.

General comments

Creating a non-written submission can be a great way of reflecting the particular experience at your provider, and might help in getting more students involved in the process. Remember this is the key way that students' views will input into the review – it is important that it is effective for the review team to use. More detail can be found in the LSR guides for each method.

It might be useful to do this by also making use of a written supporting document, giving some of the background information it may be hard to present otherwise, such as evidence sources and details on the student body.

Privacy

Remember that for all types of submission, respecting participants' privacy is important. If you plan on sharing the submission with the wider student body ensure you check with those involved that they are happy for their video clip or sound bite to be published. Remember also that the higher education provider will see the submission, so make sure your students are aware that their faces will be seen. While it is unlikely that the staff who see the submission will be able to identify students by their face, it is not impossible and students should therefore be made aware.

Please also bear in mind that some students may want to remain anonymous while still getting their views heard. You can do this with careful filming to avoid identifying the student, making use of podcasts, or by using any written supporting document to air their views.

Video submissions

Video submissions can be an excellent way of showing review teams in a very immediate way what students think about their provider. They can also be confusing and hard to follow if they are not clearly recorded with audible vocals, a clear structure, and content that is relevant to the review. It is therefore important that they have some form of introduction setting out relevant background information that enables the review team to understand what they are about to see. This would be a good point to include information about who has been involved in the submission, which students it doesn't cover, and where the evidence the review team is about to see has come from.

The review team will not find useful a video tour of your campus or simply filming a single focus group without any conclusions. If you do film focus groups or interviews with students as part of your submission, then make sure you explain how they have been put together, who was involved and what the conclusions were across all the focus groups and interviews. Perhaps consider backing these up with other evidence and using clips to emphasise points. For example, if you want to show that students are happy that their feedback is acted upon, find some statistics that show this (such as from the National Student Survey), and then have

some clips of students to back it up. Remember you can use some written evidence to help with this.

If your higher education provider has students involved in film or media production, they may want to get involved in producing the student submission. But remember – you and your provider are not being judged on your film production skills! The most important thing is to ensure that review teams get a clear understanding of the issues you are raising, and that they can see that there is clear evidence.

In terms of video format, you can submit the video file and the supporting document in the same folder when uploading it to the secure electronic site. We would strongly prefer the video to be in a format compatible with Windows Media Player to keep things consistent for the review team, so either .wmv / .avi / .wmd / .wav. The maximum file size is 80MB.

Podcast submissions

Podcast or sound bite student submissions should follow similar principles to the video submissions. Podcasts can be particularly useful for capturing the views of students who do not want to be on camera, but you must pay particular attention to ensure that audio levels are appropriate and that it is clear to the listener what they are listening to.

The review team will **not** find interviews with individual students useful if they don't have any conclusions. As with video submission, we recommend that if you record students talking you should back these up with other evidence. For example, if you want to show that students are concerned about their access to the libraries, find some statistics that show this and then have some sound clips of students to back it up. Remember you can use some written evidence to help with this.

To keep things consistent for the review team, podcast or sound bite submissions should take the format of either .wmv / .avi / .mp3 / .wav or CD file.

Presentations

Artwork or other presentations can provide a much more visual representation of students' views. Again, you may want to get art or design students involved in the making of this presentation. You could present an info graphic cover of the written report, including a visual representation of key statistics or comments. It's up to you! Just remember your student submission should meet the key criteria in the general comments above. These submissions should be sent as a .pdf file.

Uploading

All submissions should be uploaded to the review SharePoint site. Your higher education provider contact will coordinate the upload. You may wish to send us hard copies, for example CDs. Please clearly label these and provide adequate copies for the whole review team (roughly six copies).

Annex 3: Optional template for Student Submission

Please note this template is an optional template and is only meant to provide assistance as to the suggested content for each section. It is not a cover-all guide and should not be treated as such. Remember, each higher education provider is unique and therefore not all the questions here will be relevant. Equally, you may wish to talk about other areas. The questions listed below are merely meant to be a prompt.

Introduction

This is your chance to introduce your submission and talk about how it was compiled.

- Who prepared and authored the student submission?
- How many students were involved?
- How did you gather students' views?
- Are there any student groups whose voices have not been captured during the preparation of the document?
- Has it been shared with fellow students?
- Has it been approved by the student body (for example, a students' union, council or equivalent)?

Section 1: The student representative body

- What is your relationship like with your higher education provider?
- What services do the student representative body provide?

Section 2: How effectively the higher education provider has addressed the recommendations of its last review

- If you have previously had a QAA review, how have things progressed since then?
- How are students told about, or involved in, any recommendations from previous review outcomes?
- Were students involved in implementing any changes themselves?
- How effective is the higher education provider normally in sharing good practice (for example, across different programmes)?

Section 3: How effective is the higher education provider in delivering its programmes?

This section should focus on students' perceptions of how the higher education provider sets and/or maintains the standards of its awards; enables students to meet those standards through the learning opportunities it offers; provides information about its programmes; enhances the learning experience; and the extent to which students are involved in these processes.

It is not compulsory to provide answers for all of these areas, as some might not be relevant to your higher education provider. Instead, these are prompts to help you organise your thoughts and give the review team a useful understanding of students' views. The review team will not find simple 'yes/no' answers useful. Remember, you can answer all of the questions, just some of them, or add in your own areas for comment.

Academic standards

- Do students feel that their assessments are appropriate?
- Do students understand the grading criteria?
- Do students see assessment as getting more challenging as they progress through their programme (course)?
- Are students aware of the higher education provider's rules on plagiarism?

Learning opportunities

- Are students involved in the design of new programmes?
- How satisfied are students with the admissions process they went through to gain a place on their programme?
- Do students feel that staff are fully trained and qualified?
- Do students see evidence of a link between research undertaken by lecturers and the content of the modules?
- Have students had the opportunity to feedback on lectures?
- Do students believe that the learning resources are adequate?
- How useful is the higher education provider's online provision?
- How is employability embedded in the curriculum for students?
- How satisfied are students with any careers service provided?
- How satisfied (for example, with the support available) are students with disabilities?
- How satisfied are international students? What welcome do they get from the higher education provider?
- What language support do international students get?
- Does your higher education provider have a document (for example, a student charter) that sets out mutual expectations? Are students aware of this?
- Are students involved in quality assurance processes at all levels (for example, are student representatives included on committees where decisions about programmes are made)?
- How effective is student representation? How are student representatives supported?
- Are there any examples where the higher education provider has instigated a change in response to students' views?
- How does the provider use evidence such as National Student Survey scores to improve its provision?
- How satisfied are students with the way their work and progress on the programme is assessed?
- Do students feel that the feedback they receive is timely and helpful?
- Do students have access to external examiner reports?
- How do students contribute to the evaluation and review of programmes?
- How do students find out about complaints and appeals procedures?
- How satisfied are students with the outcomes and timescales of the complaints and appeals procedures?
- How satisfied are students who undertake work placements?
- If students are studying for a research degree, how satisfied are they with the support and arrangements for postgraduate study?

Information

- How useful did students find the information they received before starting at the provider?
- Is the website/information provided to students up to date?
- Is it user-friendly, accessible and fit for purpose?

Enhancement

Providers should be taking deliberate steps to systematically improve the quality of the learning opportunities they offer to students; this is referred to as 'enhancement'.

- How does the higher education provider listen to views of students when considering enhancement?
- How are students made aware of any changes or improvements to their educational experience?
- Are students aware of an ethos of continuous improvement in the higher education provider?

Conclusion

Please:

- summarise briefly the key student views
- summarise any good practice students have identified, or any recommendations they would like to make.

For further information, please refer to the Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) handbook: www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication/?PubID=3174.

If you've enjoyed being an LSR, we've always got lots going on at QAA that involves students. You could become a student reviewer, sit on our Student Advisory Board or attend one of our events - take your pick! For more information go to: www.qaa.ac.uk/partners/student-engagement

Contact us:



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