Overview United Kingdom (England)

Contents

- **1 United-Kingdom-England:Political, Social and Economic Background and Trends**
  - 1.1 United-Kingdom-England:Historical Development
  - 1.2 United-Kingdom-England:Main Executive and Legislative Bodies
  - 1.3 United-Kingdom-England:Population: Demographic Situation, Languages and Religions
  - 1.4 United-Kingdom-England:Political and Economic Situation
- **2 United-Kingdom-England:Organisation and Governance**
  - 2.1 United-Kingdom-England:Fundamental Principles and National Policies
  - 2.2 United-Kingdom-England:Lifelong Learning Strategy
  - 2.3 United-Kingdom-England:Organisation of the Education System and of its Structure
  - 2.4 United-Kingdom-England:Organisation of Private Education
  - 2.5 United-Kingdom-England:National Qualifications Framework
  - 2.6 United-Kingdom-England:Administration and Governance at Central and/or Regional Level
  - 2.7 United-Kingdom-England:Administration and Governance at Local and/or Institutional Level
  - 2.8 United-Kingdom-England:Statistics on Organisation and Governance
- **3 United-Kingdom-England:Funding in Education**
  - 3.1 United-Kingdom-England:Early Childhood and School Education Funding
  - 3.2 United-Kingdom-England:Higher Education Funding
  - 3.3 United-Kingdom-England:Adult Education and Training Funding
- **4 United-Kingdom-England:Early Childhood Education and Care**
  - 4.1 United-Kingdom-England:Organisation of Programmes for Children over 2-3 years
  - 4.2 United-Kingdom-England:Teaching and Learning in Programmes for Children over 2-3 years
  - 4.3 United-Kingdom-England:Assessment in Programmes for Children over 2-3 years
  - 4.4 United-Kingdom-England:Organisational Variations and Alternative Structures in Early Childhood Education and Care
- **5 United-Kingdom-England:Primary Education**
  - 5.1 United-Kingdom-England:Organisation of Primary Education
  - 5.2 United-Kingdom-England:Teaching and Learning in Primary Education
  - 5.3 United-Kingdom-England:Assessment in Primary Education
  - 5.4 United-Kingdom-England:Organisational Variations and Alternative Structures in Primary Education
- **6 United-Kingdom-England:Secondary and Post-Secondary Non-Tertiary Education**
  - 6.1 United-Kingdom-England:Organisation of General Lower Secondary Education
  - 6.2 United-Kingdom-England:Teaching and Learning in General Lower Secondary Education
  - 6.3 United-Kingdom-England:Assessment in General Lower Secondary Education
  - 6.4 United-Kingdom-England:Organisation of General Upper Secondary Education
  - 6.5 United-Kingdom-England:Teaching and Learning in General Upper Secondary Education
  - 6.6 United-Kingdom-England:Assessment in General Upper Secondary Education
6.7 United-Kingdom-England: Organisation of Vocational Upper Secondary Education
6.8 United-Kingdom-England: Teaching and Learning in Vocational Upper Secondary Education
6.9 United-Kingdom-England: Assessment in Vocational Upper Secondary Education
6.10 United-Kingdom-England: Post-Secondary Non-Tertiary Education

- 7 United-Kingdom-England: Higher Education
  - 7.1 United-Kingdom-England: Types of Higher Education Institutions
  - 7.2 United-Kingdom-England: First Cycle Programmes
    - 7.2.1 United-Kingdom-England: Bachelor
    - 7.2.2 United-Kingdom-England: Short-Cycle Higher Education
  - 7.3 United-Kingdom-England: Second Cycle Programmes
  - 7.4 United-Kingdom-England: Programmes outside the Bachelor and Master Structure
  - 7.5 United-Kingdom-England: Third Cycle (PhD) Programmes

- 8 United-Kingdom-England: Adult Education and Training
  - 8.1 United-Kingdom-England: Distribution of Responsibilities
  - 8.2 United-Kingdom-England: Developments and Current Policy Priorities
  - 8.3 United-Kingdom-England: Main Providers
  - 8.4 United-Kingdom-England: Main Types of Provision
  - 8.5 United-Kingdom-England: Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning

- 9 United-Kingdom-England: Teachers and Education Staff
  - 9.1 United-Kingdom-England: Initial Education for Teachers Working in Early Childhood and School Education
  - 9.2 United-Kingdom-England: Conditions of Service for Teachers Working in Early Childhood and School Education
  - 9.3 United-Kingdom-England: Continuing Professional Development for Teachers Working in Early Childhood and School Education
  - 9.4 United-Kingdom-England: Initial Education for Academic Staff in Higher Education
  - 9.5 United-Kingdom-England: Conditions of Service for Academic Staff Working in Higher Education
  - 9.6 United-Kingdom-England: Continuing Professional Development for Academic Staff Working in Higher Education
  - 9.7 United-Kingdom-England: Initial Education for Teachers and Trainers Working in Adult Education and Training
  - 9.8 United-Kingdom-England: Conditions of Service for Teachers and Trainers Working in Adult Education and Training
  - 9.9 United-Kingdom-England: Continuing Professional Development for Teachers and Trainers Working in Adult Education and Training

- 10 United-Kingdom-England: Management and Other Education Staff
  - 10.1 United-Kingdom-England: Management Staff for Early Childhood and School Education
  - 10.2 United-Kingdom-England: Staff Involved in Monitoring Educational Quality for Early Childhood and School Education
  - 10.3 United-Kingdom-England: Education Staff Responsible for Guidance in Early Childhood and School Education
  - 10.4 United-Kingdom-England: Other Education Staff or Staff Working with Schools
  - 10.5 United-Kingdom-England: Management Staff for Higher Education
  - 10.6 United-Kingdom-England: Other Education Staff or Staff Working in Higher Education
  - 10.7 United-Kingdom-England: Management Staff Working in Adult Education and Training
  - 10.8 United-Kingdom-England: Other Education Staff or Staff Working in Adult Education
and Training

- **11 United-Kingdom-England:Quality Assurance**
  - 11.1 United-Kingdom-England:Quality Assurance in Early Childhood and School Education
  - 11.2 United-Kingdom-England:Quality Assurance in Higher Education
  - 11.3 United-Kingdom-England:Quality Assurance in Adult Education and Training

- **12 United-Kingdom-England:Educational Support and Guidance**
  - 12.1 United-Kingdom-England:Special Education Needs Provision within Mainstream Education
  - 12.2 United-Kingdom-England: Separate Special Education Needs Provision in Early Childhood and School Education
  - 12.3 United-Kingdom-England:Support Measures for Learners in Early Childhood and School Education
  - 12.4 United-Kingdom-England:Guidance and Counselling in Early Childhood and School Education
  - 12.5 United-Kingdom-England:Support Measures for Learners in Higher Education
  - 12.6 United-Kingdom-England:Guidance and Counselling in Higher Education
  - 12.7 United-Kingdom-England:Support Measures for Learners in Adult Education and Training
  - 12.8 United-Kingdom-England:Guidance and Counselling in a Lifelong Learning Approach

- **13 United-Kingdom-England:Mobility and Internationalisation**
  - 13.1 United-Kingdom-England:Mobility in Early Childhood and School Education
  - 13.2 United-Kingdom-England:Mobility in Higher Education
  - 13.3 United-Kingdom-England:Mobility in Adult Education and Training
  - 13.4 United-Kingdom-England:Other Dimensions of Internationalisation in Early Childhood and School Education
  - 13.5 United-Kingdom-England:Other Dimensions of Internationalisation in Higher Education
  - 13.6 United-Kingdom-England:Other Dimensions of Internationalisation in Adult Education and Training
  - 13.7 United-Kingdom-England:Bilateral Agreements and Worldwide Cooperation

- **14 United-Kingdom-England:Ongoing Reforms and Policy Developments**
  - 14.1 United-Kingdom-England:National Reforms in Early Childhood Education and Care
  - 14.2 United-Kingdom-England:National Reforms in School Education
  - 14.3 United-Kingdom-England:National Reforms in Vocational Education and Training and Adult Learning
  - 14.4 United-Kingdom-England:National Reforms in Higher Education
  - 14.5 United-Kingdom-England:National Reforms related to Transversal Skills and Employability
  - 14.6 United-Kingdom-England:European Perspective

- **15 United-Kingdom-England:Legislation**

- **16 United-Kingdom-England:Glossary**

United-Kingdom-England:Political, Social
and Economic Background and Trends

United-Kingdom-England:Historical Development

United-Kingdom-England:Main Executive and Legislative Bodies

United-Kingdom-England:Population: Demographic Situation, Languages and Religions

United-Kingdom-England:Political and Economic Situation

United-Kingdom-England:Organisation and Governance

United-Kingdom-England:Fundamental Principles and National Policies

United-Kingdom-England:Lifelong Learning Strategy

United-Kingdom-England:Organisation of the Education System and of its Structure

United-Kingdom-England:Organisation of Private Education

United-Kingdom-England:National Qualifications Framework

United-Kingdom-England:Administration and Governance at Central and/or Regional Level

United-Kingdom-England:Administration and Governance at Local and/or Institutional Level

United-Kingdom-England:Statistics on Organisation and Governance
United-Kingdom-England:Funding in Education

United-Kingdom-England:Early Childhood and School Education Funding

United-Kingdom-England:Higher Education Funding

United-Kingdom-England:Adult Education and Training Funding

United-Kingdom-England:Early Childhood Education and Care

United-Kingdom-England:Organisation of Programmes for Children over 2-3 years

United-Kingdom-England:Teaching and Learning in Programmes for Children over 2-3 years

United-Kingdom-England:Assessment in Programmes for Children over 2-3 years

United-Kingdom-England:Organisational Variations and Alternative Structures in Early Childhood Education and Care

United-Kingdom-England:Primary Education

United-Kingdom-England:Organisation of Primary Education

United-Kingdom-England:Teaching and Learning in Primary Education

United-Kingdom-England:Assessment in Primary Education
United-Kingdom-England:Higher Education

United-Kingdom-England:Types of Higher Education Institutions

United-Kingdom-England:First Cycle Programmes
United-Kingdom-England:Bachelor
United-Kingdom-England:Short-Cycle Higher Education

United-Kingdom-England:Second Cycle Programmes
United-Kingdom-England:Programmes outside the Bachelor and Master Structure

United-Kingdom-England:Third Cycle (PhD) Programmes

United-Kingdom-England:Adult Education and Training

United-Kingdom-England:Distribution of Responsibilities
United-Kingdom-England:Developments and Current Policy Priorities

United-Kingdom-England:Main Providers
United-Kingdom-England:Main Types of Provision
United-Kingdom-England:Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning

United-Kingdom-England:Teachers and Education Staff

United-Kingdom-England:Initial Education for Teachers
Working in Early Childhood and School Education

United-Kingdom-England: Conditions of Service for Teachers Working in Early Childhood and School Education

United-Kingdom-England: Continuing Professional Development for Teachers Working in Early Childhood and School Education

United-Kingdom-England: Initial Education for Academic Staff in Higher Education

United-Kingdom-England: Conditions of Service for Academic Staff Working in Higher Education

United-Kingdom-England: Continuing Professional Development for Academic Staff Working in Higher Education

United-Kingdom-England: Initial Education for Teachers and Trainers Working in Adult Education and Training

United-Kingdom-England: Conditions of Service for Teachers and Trainers Working in Adult Education and Training

United-Kingdom-England: Continuing Professional Development for Teachers and Trainers Working in Adult Education and Training

United-Kingdom-England: Management and Other Education Staff

United-Kingdom-England: Management Staff for Early Childhood and School Education

United-Kingdom-England: Staff Involved in Monitoring
Educational Quality for Early Childhood and School Education

United-Kingdom-England:Education Staff Responsible for Guidance in Early Childhood and School Education

United-Kingdom-England:Other Education Staff or Staff Working with Schools

United-Kingdom-England:Management Staff for Higher Education

United-Kingdom-England:Other Education Staff or Staff Working in Higher Education

United-Kingdom-England:Management Staff Working in Adult Education and Training

United-Kingdom-England:Other Education Staff or Staff Working in Adult Education and Training

United-Kingdom-England:Quality Assurance

United-Kingdom-England:Quality Assurance in Early Childhood and School Education

United-Kingdom-England:Quality Assurance in Higher Education

United-Kingdom-England:Quality Assurance in Adult Education and Training

United-Kingdom-England:Educational Support and Guidance

United-Kingdom-England:Special Education Needs Provision
within Mainstream Education

United-Kingdom-England: Separate Special Education Needs Provision in Early Childhood and School Education

United-Kingdom-England: Support Measures for Learners in Early Childhood and School Education

United-Kingdom-England: Guidance and Counselling in Early Childhood and School Education

United-Kingdom-England: Support Measures for Learners in Higher Education

United-Kingdom-England: Guidance and Counselling in Higher Education

United-Kingdom-England: Support Measures for Learners in Adult Education and Training

United-Kingdom-England: Guidance and Counselling in a Lifelong Learning Approach

United-Kingdom-England: Mobility and Internationalisation

United-Kingdom-England: Mobility in Early Childhood and School Education

United-Kingdom-England: Mobility in Higher Education

United-Kingdom-England: Mobility in Adult Education and Training

United-Kingdom-England: Other Dimensions of Internationalisation in Early Childhood and School
Education

United-Kingdom-England:Other Dimensions of Internationalisation in Higher Education

United-Kingdom-England:Other Dimensions of Internationalisation in Adult Education and Training

United-Kingdom-England:Bilateral Agreements and Worldwide Cooperation

United-Kingdom-England:Ongoing Reforms and Policy Developments

United-Kingdom-England:National Reforms in Early Childhood Education and Care

United-Kingdom-England:National Reforms in School Education

United-Kingdom-England:National Reforms in Vocational Education and Training and Adult Learning

United-Kingdom-England:National Reforms in Higher Education

United-Kingdom-England:National Reforms related to Transversal Skills and Employability

United-Kingdom-England:European Perspective

United-Kingdom-England:Legislation

United-Kingdom-England:Glossary

- Austria
- Belgium (Flemish Community)
- Belgium (French Community)
Higher education institutions are autonomous, self-governing institutions. Each is responsible for the quality of its own programmes and, for those institutions with degree awarding powers, for the academic standards of the awards it offers.

Higher education institutions operate within a regulatory framework that covers the grant of powers to award degrees, the right to use university or university college title, the receipt of public funding via HEFCE (the Higher Education Funding Council for England) and designation for student support purposes. This framework is described in relation to the responsible bodies in the subsection below on Responsible Bodies. Information is also available in HEFCE’s technical article on gateways to the system.

Beyond this regulatory framework, the system incorporates a number of elements that aim to
safeguard the public interest in sound standards of higher education qualifications and to inform and encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of higher education. These elements incorporate internal and external scrutiny and a shared set of reference points. They are described in the subsection below on Approaches and Methods for Quality Assurance.

**Responsible Bodies**

The roles of the different responsible bodies are specified in the [Operating Framework for Higher Education](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/operating-framework-for-higher-education), which provides the framework for holding to account and regulating higher education providers in England. It applies to providers which have one or more of the following features:

- receive direct public grants for HE
- have courses which have been specifically designated by the Government as eligible for the purposes of English student support funding
- are higher education institutions (HEIs)
- have the right to award one or more types of UK degree.

Note that the establishment of the framework in 2013 brought together the existing system into a single coherent framework without substantially altering it, although there are some new and reformed elements flowing from the Higher Education White Paper [Students at the Heart of the System](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/students-at-the-heart-of-the-system) (2011).

The responsible bodies are as follows:

The **Department for Business, Innovation and Skills** (BIS) is the lead government department for higher education and sets the regulatory framework. BIS has a lead role in advising the Privy Council (see below) on applications for degree awarding powers and in advising both the Privy Council and Companies House (the executive agency which incorporates and registers information about companies, including some higher education providers) on university and university college title applications and is responsible for monitoring whether these protected terms are used legally within the UK. Note that for the power to award bachelors, masters and doctoral degrees and for the right to use the title ‘university’, the relevant criteria (covering aspects such as governance and academic management, academic standards and quality assurance, and scholarship and the pedagogical effectiveness of academic staff) are detailed in 2004 guidance [Applications for the Grant of Taught Degree Awarding Powers, Research Degree Awarding Powers and University Title](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/applications-for-the-grant-of-taught-degree-awarding-powers-research-degree-awarding-powers-and-university-title). More information on government functions in respect of recognised UK degrees is available [here](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/applications-for-the-grant-of-taught-degree-awarding-powers-research-degree-awarding-powers-and-university-title).

BIS also sets the terms and conditions (normally concerning academic quality, financial sustainability, management and governance) under which individual programmes which do not have ‘institutional designation’ under the terms of regulations made under the [Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teaching-and-higher-education-act-1998) are designated as eligible for student support. More information on designation for student support purposes is available [here](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teaching-and-higher-education-act-1998).

The **Higher Education Funding Council for England** (HEFCE) leads the operating framework for the regulation and funding of higher education.

HEFCE is a non-departmental public body, sponsored by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS). It works within a policy framework set by the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, but is not part of BIS. It has a statutory duty under the [Further and Higher Education Act 1992](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/further-and-higher-education-act-1992)
**Education Act 1992** to ensure the assessment of quality of the provision that it funds. It does this through the following means:

HEFCE is the main regulator of the financial sustainability and governance of higher education providers in receipt of HEFCE funding, deriving its power from the [Further and Higher Education Act 1992](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/education-standards-governance-and-accountability). Financial sustainability, management and governance are covered in HEFCE’s annual risk assessments, along with other factors.

Conditions of grant from HEFCE are laid out in HEFCE’s [Memorandum of Assurance and Accountability](https://www.hefce.ac.uk/gov祢思nance/). These include the condition that HEFCE-funding must be used for the educational purposes for which it is provided and that institutions must subscribe to the Higher Education Statistics Agency ([HESA](https://www.hesa.ac.uk)) and provide all required data returns to HESA. In the context of the shift of the balance of public funding to institutions away from teaching grant towards student tuition fees, a [voluntary agreement on institutional designation](https://www.hefce.ac.uk/gov祢思nance/) was made in April 2014 between HEFCE and the sector representative bodies. The agreement extends these conditions to funding provided through the publicly subsidised student support system.

HEFCE also has a contract with the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education ([QAA](https://www.qaa.ac.uk)) to conduct reviews of quality and standards in higher education institutions that it funds. If a HEFCE-funded institution receives a ‘does not meet’ judgment in a Higher Education Review undertaken by QAA, and fails to improve through the QAA follow-up process, this will trigger HEFCE’s policy for addressing unsatisfactory quality in institutions.

HEFCE, together with the other three UK higher education funding bodies (the [Higher Education Funding Council for Wales](https://www.hefcw.ac.uk), the [Department for Employment and Learning, Northern Ireland](https://www.dfe.gov.uk/northernireland), and the [Scottish Funding Council](https://www.sfc.ac.uk)), is responsible for the [Research Excellence Framework](https://www.hefce.ac.uk/gov祢思nance/). This framework assesses the quality of research undertaken in higher education institutions periodically on a UK-wide basis, to inform the selective allocation of research funding to HEIs, as well as to provide accountability for public investment. See the subheading ‘External Assessment of Quality of Research’ below further information.

The [Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education](https://www.qaa.ac.uk) (QAA) is responsible for the external evaluation of HEIs throughout the UK. QAA was set up in 1997 as an independent body funded by subscriptions from universities and colleges of higher education throughout the UK, as well as through contracts with the funding bodies. The QAA is not a regulator. It has no powers over HEIs and no statutory authority. The QAA advises government on applications for the granting of degree awarding powers, university title, or designation as a higher education institution. See the subheading ‘Degree Awarding Powers’ in the article on *Types of Higher Education Institutions* and QAA’s guidance on *The Right to Award UK Degrees* (2014). The QAA acts on behalf of the UK higher education funding bodies in respect of the assessment of the quality of education. It aims to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of higher education qualifications, and to encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of higher education. It does this in two ways: by providing reference points that help to define clear and explicit standards and by reviewing standards and quality using peer review processes where teams of academics conduct audits and reviews. Reviews are carried out using a variety of methods depending on the country (England, Wales, Northern Ireland or Scotland) and the type of higher education provision.

The [Privy Council](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/privy-council) is a senior UK government committee which decides on HE providers’ applications for degree awarding powers and for the right to use the titles ‘university’ and ‘university college’. The Privy Council is advised in these matters by BIS (see above) which itself is advised on particular applications by the QAA (see above).
The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) is a charitable company funded by subscriptions from providers of higher education. HESA collects a range of data every year UK-wide from universities, higher education colleges and other differently funded providers of higher education. These data are provided to UK governments and higher education funding bodies to support their work in regulating and funding higher education providers.

The Office for Fair Access (OFFA), led by the Director of Fair Access to Higher Education, was created by the Higher Education Act 2004, with the aim of ensuring that the higher tuition fees introduced under the Act from 2006 did not deter appropriately qualified people from disadvantaged backgrounds from entering higher education. The Act required providers that wished to charge above the basic fee level to submit an access agreement subject to the approval of the Director of Fair Access to Higher Education. The Director of Fair Access has a number of sanctions if an institution breaches its agreement, and fails to rectify such a breach.

**Professional, statutory or regulatory bodies** (PSRBs) regulate professional and occupational standards and issue their own licences for professional practice. There are accreditation arrangements through which the syllabus for certain programmes in subjects such as architecture, engineering, medicine and law is reviewed and approved for recognition by the relevant body as an initial phase of professional training or for exemption from a professional examination.

**Ofsted, the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills**, is responsible for conducting inspections of all providers of programmes leading to Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) for school teachers and for programmes of further education teacher training validated by higher education institutions.

### Approaches and Methods for Quality Assurance

Higher education institutions are autonomous, self-governing institutions. Each is responsible for the quality of its own programmes and, for those institutions with degree awarding powers, for the academic standards of the awards it offers. The approaches used incorporate internal and external scrutiny and a shared set of reference points.

Higher Education Review is an external process examining how effectively each higher education provider operates its internal quality assurance system. It is described below under the subheading ‘External Review of Higher Education Institutions’.

Evaluation of research in higher education institutions is carried out every few years on a UK-wide basis on behalf of the four UK higher education funding bodies. See the subheading ‘External assessment of quality of research’ below for details.

### The Quality Code (reference points for internal and external review)

The **Quality Code for Higher Education** is the definitive reference point for all UK higher education providers, though use of the Quality Code documentation itself is voluntary. It makes clear what higher education providers are required to do, what they can expect of each other, and what
students and the general public can expect of them. The Quality Code covers all four nations of the UK (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales) and all providers of UK higher education operating internationally. It protects the interests of all students, regardless of where they are studying or whether they are full-time, part-time, undergraduate or postgraduate students.

The Quality Code comprises three parts, as outlined below:

Part A: Setting and maintaining academic standards

- Chapter A1: UK and European reference points for academic standards
- Chapter A2: Degree-awarding bodies’ reference points for academic standards
- Chapter A3: securing academic standards and an outcomes-based approach to academic awards.

Part B: Assuring and enhancing academic quality

- Chapter B1: Programme design, development and approval
- Chapter B2: Recruitment, selection and admission to higher education
- Chapter B3: Learning and teaching
- Chapter B4: Enabling student development and achievement
- Chapter B5: Student engagement
- Chapter B6: Assessment of students and the recognition of prior learning
- Chapter B7: External examining
- Chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review
- Chapter B9: Academic appeals and student complaints
- Chapter B10: Managing higher education provision with others
- Chapter B11: Research degrees

Part C: Information about higher education provision

- This shorter part is not subdivided into chapters. It addresses how providers produce information that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

Note that there is no national accreditation of programmes (other than the accreditation by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies, PSRBs, to provide assurance that a programme meets the standards required by a particular profession), but higher education providers must have quality assurance procedures for their programmes, which should be informed by the Quality Code. Typically, this is an internal process which encompasses two separate but complementary measures: programme monitoring and programme review. As described in Chapter B8 of the Code, **programme monitoring** refers to a regular, systematic process. It may take place annually or at shorter or longer intervals and provides a check on ongoing learning and teaching provision at an operational level. **Programme review** occurs less frequently, but periodically and to an agreed cycle. It has a broader remit and is informed by a view of trends over time. The review of a programme may be related to its re-approval, if the original approval was time limited. In both cases, the unit of learning under consideration may be a module or group of modules, or a programme or group of programmes, or monitoring and review may take place at the departmental, subject or organisational level.

Higher education providers may use different terminology from that adopted in Chapter B8 or use the same terminology in different ways in relation to monitoring and review, reflecting their individual history and approach. For example, the monitoring which takes place at the end of each academic cycle may be described as annual monitoring or annual review, and the less frequent
review process is often described as periodic review.

Note that the QAA’s Quality Code for Higher Education takes account of the guidance in the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). Therefore, although the ESG is not a separate reference point, if an institution is engaging with the Quality Code it follows that it will also be taking account of ESG. More information is available from the QAA website.

**External Examining**

External examining is an integral and long-standing part of the system for higher education in the United Kingdom. Each institution with degree awarding powers is responsible for the academic standards of the awards it offers. External examining plays an important and essential role in every degree awarding institution’s arrangements for assuring its academic standards.

External examiners are experienced higher education teachers who offer an independent assessment of academic standards and the quality of assessment to the appointing institution. Acting as an external examiner generally involves the review of a selection of exam scripts, assignments and dissertations followed by informal engagement with staff to discuss the assessed work and the formal meeting of the examination board.

The Quality Code for Higher Education includes the following Expectation about external examining, which higher education providers are required to meet:

> Higher education providers make scrupulous use of external examiners.

See Chapter B7: External examining.

The Higher Education Academy (HEA) has collected reference sources and resources for external examiners here. These include the External examining handbook, published in 2012, which also contains a brief history of external examining in the UK.

**External Review of Higher Education Institutions**

Higher Education Review is the review method for higher education institutions in England from 2013-14. The key reference point used in this review method is the UK Quality Code for Higher Education. The overall aim of Higher Education Review is to inform students and the wider public whether a provider meets the expectations of the higher education sector for:

- the setting and/or maintenance of academic standards
- the provision of learning opportunities
- the provision of information
- the enhancement of the quality of students’ learning opportunities.

The process is also designed to highlight good practice, to affirm progress made in areas previously highlighted for development, and to encourage future improvements.

Higher Education Review involves a core element and a thematic element. The core element focuses on academic standards, quality of learning opportunities, information and enhancement, whereas
the thematic element focuses on an area which is regarded as particularly worthy of further analysis or enhancement. This is selected by the Higher Education Review Group (HERG), which includes representatives of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), Universities UK, GuildHE and Association of Colleges, and it changes periodically. For 2015-16 the themes will be student employability and digital literacy. Providers undergoing reviews in 2015-16 will be required to explore one of these themes.

Under Higher Education Review, those providers with a strong track record in managing quality and standards are reviewed less frequently and less intensively than providers without such a strong record (every six years rather than the standard four years). The review is carried out by peer reviewers - staff and students from other providers - and results in a report containing judgements and other findings.

Students are involved as full members of QAA’s peer review teams, and there are also opportunities for students to take part in the review by contributing a student submission, meeting the review team, and working with their providers in response to review outcomes.

QAA sets up the review and appoints the review team which includes up to six members with experience or expertise in UK higher education, including one student reviewer. Details of how and upon what criteria team members are appointed are available (as Annex 6) within QAA’s Higher Education Review: a Handbook for Providers (2014). Within the HEI under review there is a facilitator who, alongside a student representative, acts as a point of liaison between the review team and the institution. QAA appoints an officer who is responsible for managing the review, collating the findings and writing a report which is published on the QAA website.

An advance briefing is held by QAA for the facilitators and lead student representatives from all HEIs whose reviews are due to happen at about the same time, following which there is a visit to the HEI by the QAA coordinating officer to confirm the structure and arrangements of the review.

Prior to the review the HEI submits evidence electronically to the QAA. This includes a self-evaluation document and a statement from the students known as the ‘student submission’. The review team undertakes preliminary desk-based analysis of this evidence and the review visit itself lasts one to five days (one-day visits are made only to very small providers serving fewer than 50 students).

Judgements about the HEI are made in the following areas and graded accordingly:

- Threshold academic standards – three possible grades: meets UK expectations, requires improvement to meet UK expectations and does not meet UK expectations.
- Learning opportunities, information and enhancement – four possible grades: is commended, meets UK expectations, requires improvement to meet UK expectations and does not meet UK expectations.

Review judgements may be differentiated so that different judgements may apply, for example, to undergraduate and postgraduate levels, or to the provision associated with different degree awarding bodies or other awarding organisations.

Following the review, all HEIs are expected to produce an action plan responding to the report’s recommendations and affirmations. When an institution receives a judgement of ‘commended’ or ‘meets UK expectations’ in all four areas, the report is formally signed off on publication of the action plan. HEIs achieving these successful outcomes are entitled to use the QAA Quality Mark (if they are QAA subscribers) or the QAA Review Graphic (non-subscribers) to indicate that they have
met the required standards. If an institution receives a judgement of ‘requires improvement to meet’ or ‘does not meet’ in any area, a formal programme of follow-up activity will follow after the report is published. QAA publishes all final reports of reviews and expects providers to publish their institutional action plans.

In cases of a ‘requires improvement to meet’ judgement, institutions are expected to address the weaknesses identified within a year of the report’s publication. If sufficient progress is not made after this time, the next level of follow-up activity will begin: that for a ‘does not meet’ judgement. In such cases, institutions are required to submit a series of progress reports over a year and will then undergo a second institutional review. Providing satisfactory progress has been made, the review will be signed off. Otherwise, the Higher Education Funding Council for England’s (HEFCE’s) Policy for Addressing Unsatisfactory Quality in Institutions from 2013-14 (HEFCE, 2013) will be invoked. As an ultimate sanction, HEFCE may defer or withhold some or all funding from institutions which still fail to meet the minimum standard.


**External Review of Other Higher Education Provision**

As well as conducting Higher Education Reviews, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) uses a range of review methods for different types of higher education provision:

- reviews of higher education delivered by private providers – educational oversight reviews and reviews for specific course designation
- reviews of higher education delivered overseas – Review of Overseas Provision is the process for reviewing higher education programmes delivered by UK institutions through partnership links with organisations abroad or delivered on overseas campuses
- reviews of professional programmes - QAA is contracted to carry out reviews of higher education provision on certain professional programmes: General Osteopathic Council Review (the method for reviewing osteopathic courses and course providers) and Graduate Leaders in Early Years Programmes (including the Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) award and Early Years Teacher Status (EYTS), which are accredited by government through the National College for Teaching and Leadership).

More information on these review methods is available from the QAA website.

Ofsted, the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills, conducts inspections of all providers of programmes leading to qualified teacher status (QTS) for school teachers, and of programmes of further education teacher training validated by higher education institutions. The Initial Teacher Education (ITE) Inspection Handbook sets out the statutory basis and framework for initial teacher education (ITE) inspections from April 2015.
Publication of Information

As indicated above, Higher Education Review reports are published by QAA.

Performance indicators on aspects of institutional performance are published. They are intended to offer an objective measure of how a higher education institution is performing, to contribute to greater public accountability as well as to ensure that policy decisions can be made on the basis of consistent and reliable information. Performance indicators provide comparative data on the performance of institutions in widening participation, student retention, learning and teaching outcomes, research output and employment of graduates. They cover publicly funded higher education institutions over the whole of the UK. Further information on performance indicators is available from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA).

Key Information Sets (KIS) are comparable sets of information about full- or part-time undergraduate (first cycle) courses and are designed to meet the information needs of prospective students. They cover publicly funded higher education institutions over the whole of the UK. KIS data is published on the Unistats website and includes:

- student satisfaction from the National Student Survey
- student destinations on finishing their course from the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education survey
- how the course is taught and study patterns
- how the course is assessed
- course accreditation
- course costs (such as tuition fees and accommodation).

External Assessment of Quality of Research

The evaluation of research in higher education institutions is carried out every few years on a UK-wide basis on behalf of the four UK higher education funding bodies (the Higher Education Funding Council for England, the Scottish Funding Council, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales and the Department for Employment and Learning, Northern Ireland).

Evaluation is based on academic peer review of selected research outputs for each unit of assessment (subject area) and is carried out by subject-specific assessment panels. The outcomes are used to:

- inform the distribution of quality-related funding for research by the funding bodies
- provide accountability for public investment in research
- provide benchmarking information and establish reputational yardsticks.

The method used is the Research Excellence Framework (REF), a single unified framework for the funding and assessment of research across all subjects. Assessment combines quantitative indicators, including bibliometric indicators wherever these are appropriate, and light-touch expert review. The balance between the methods used varies as appropriate to each subject. The REF was first completed in 2014 and informs the selective allocation of research funding from 2015/16.

Historical note: Prior to the introduction of the REF, the review method in use from 1986 – 2008 was the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE). The outcomes of the final RAE were published by the funding bodies in December 2008 and were used to inform the distribution of quality-related funding until 2014/15. For the 2008 exercise, institutions submitted research outputs (publications, products, artistic performances, etc.) for evaluation. Research assessments of these were made
through peer review by panel members selected for their eminence and experience as practising researchers in their subject. Quality ratings were judged against standards of national and international excellence. Results were published as a continuously graded quality profile. Quality profiles were criterion-referenced against clearly defined common standards. The REF now makes greater use of quantitative indicators in the assessment of research quality than did the RAE, while taking account of key differences between the different disciplines.

Information on legislation referenced in articles about England is available [here](#). A glossary of terms can be found [here](#).