

## Arrangements for assessing quality and standards from April 2023

14 October 2022

1. This briefing for higher education providers in England explains the approach the Office for Students (OfS) will take to assessing quality and standards from 1 April 2023. It follows the announcement<sup>1</sup> by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) that it has asked the Secretary of State for Education to remove its designation to perform the assessment functions in England from the end of March 2023.
2. The OfS is working with the QAA to ensure it delivers its remaining assessment work over the next six months, and to ensure a smooth transition to the new arrangements. The QAA has committed to deliver transition arrangements that minimise disruption to providers, enable continuity of service, and ensure an orderly handover.
3. We are in contact with providers currently applying (or intending to apply) to register with the OfS, or for degree awarding powers (DAPs), to tell them how these changes will affect their application.
4. From 1 April 2023 the OfS will undertake all quality and standards assessments for an interim period. In parallel, we will consider options for longer-term arrangements. We plan to continue to discuss a range of options with sector representative groups and will keep providers updated as our plans develop.

### Background

5. The Higher Education and Research Act 2017 (HERA) gives the OfS a duty to assess, or make arrangements for the assessment of, quality and standards where this is for the purpose of deciding whether conditions of registration are satisfied. The OfS also has powers to make decisions about authorisations of degree awarding powers (DAPs).
6. HERA makes provision for a body to be designated to carry out these assessment functions on behalf of the OfS. The QAA was designated by the Secretary of State in 2018 and currently undertakes the following work for the OfS:
  - a. Quality and standards review (QSRs) for providers seeking registration (available for providers that applied for registration before 1 May 2022).
  - b. Standards assessments for the purpose of assessing initial condition B8 for providers that applied for registration after 1 May 2022.

---

<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/news-events/news/qaa-demits-dqb-status-to-focus-on-sector-and-students-in-england>.

- c. Assessments for DAPs. HERA requires the OfS to request and consider advice from the designated body before any order is made in relation to DAPs.
  - d. External Quality Assurance (EQA) of end-point assessments for integrated higher and degree apprenticeships.
7. The QAA announced on 20 July 2022 that it would no longer consent to be the designated body in England after the current designation year ends on 31 March 2023.<sup>2</sup> There is a statutory requirement for the Secretary of State to consult before removing designation and we expect this to take place in good time for a decision to be made before 31 March.
8. From 1 April 2023, we do not therefore expect there to be a designated body in place to perform the assessment functions. This means that the assessment functions revert to the OfS and we will perform all of the assessment functions, including those currently delivered by the QAA, from that date.

## Arrangements from 1 April 2023

9. From 1 April 2023 the OfS will undertake the following assessment activities that are currently delivered by the DQB:
- a. QSRs for providers seeking registration (available for providers that applied for registration before 1 May 2022).
  - b. Standards assessments for the purpose of assessing initial condition B8 for providers that applied for registration after 1 May 2022.
  - c. Assessments for DAPs.
  - d. EQA of end-point assessments for integrated higher and degree apprenticeships.
10. In addition, the OfS will continue to undertake quality assessments as part of its programme of investigations<sup>3</sup> arising from concerns about compliance with ongoing conditions of registration relating to quality.
11. To support our programme of investigations we have now recruited a pool of high calibre academic experts. We plan to expand this pool to provide increased capacity as we take on additional assessment activity from the QAA and will therefore be able to draw on expert academic judgement as we consider appropriate.
12. The providers most likely to be subject to assessment by the OfS are those seeking registration or degree awarding powers, or registered providers for which we have compliance concerns in relation to quality or standards. Our risk-based approach to regulation means that a high quality registered provider with full DAPs on an indefinite basis, that does not present compliance concerns, is unlikely to be subject to assessment activity.

---

<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/news-events/news/qaa-demits-dqb-status-to-focus-on-sector-and-students-in-england>.

<sup>3</sup> For further information see [New OfS investigations to examine credibility of degrees - Office for Students](#); and [Regulator opens investigations into quality of higher education courses - Office for Students](#).

## Statutory fees

13. The QAA currently charges statutory fees<sup>4</sup> for its work as the designated body. Fees are charged to each individual provider subject to an assessment and we expect that arrangement to continue from 1 April 2023.
14. The QAA also charges a statutory fee to all registered providers, whether or not they are subject to an assessment. This is calculated on the basis of a provider's student numbers, with larger providers paying more than smaller providers – for example a large provider with more than 30,000 students paid £14,275 to the QAA this year. That fee will not be charged in 2023-24, resulting in a reduction in the costs of regulation for all registered providers.
15. We expect the QAA to continue to offer its voluntary membership services to providers in England and it is important that all providers understand that the OfS does not expect or require them to pay to participate in this, or any other, scheme. Providers are free to decide to pay for QAA membership if they wish, but participation or following QAA guidance does not mean that a provider will satisfy the OfS's regulatory requirements. Our requirements for quality and standards are set out in the conditions of registration<sup>5</sup> in our regulatory framework and all providers must ensure that they properly understand and comply with these, rather than any other expectations or guidance.

## Guidance for providers applying for registration with the OfS

16. We have published updated guidance<sup>6</sup> on our approach to assessing applications for registration with the OfS. This includes guidance about how we will assess quality and standards during the registration process. We will update our guidance as appropriate during the transition period to ensure providers are clear about the arrangements in place from 1 April 2023.
17. We will update guidance relating to applications for degree awarding powers in spring 2023.

---

<sup>4</sup> See <https://dqbenland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/dqb-statutory-charging-statement-2022-23.pdf> [PDF].

<sup>5</sup> See [Conditions of registration - Office for Students](#).

<sup>6</sup> See [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/regulatory-advice-3-registration-of-english-higher-education-providers-with-the-ofs/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/regulatory-advice-3-registration-of-english-higher-education-providers-with-the-ofs/).