

Office for Students - Quality assessment committee: terms of reference

Purpose

1. The Office for Students (OfS) has established a Quality assessment committee (QAC) as required under Section 24(1) of the Higher Education and Research Act (HERA) 2017. The QAC provides advice to the OfS on the exercise of its functions under section 23 of the Higher Education and Research Act (HERA) 2017 and such other functions that the OfS may confer on it.
2. While a body is designated under Schedule 4 to perform the OfS's functions under section 23, the QAC also has the role of giving advice to the OfS on the exercise by the designated body of those functions.

Responsibilities

3. The OfS Quality assessment committee will support the OfS in shaping its approach to its quality and standards functions. It will provide advice on:
 - a. the approach to be taken, under Section 23 of HERA, to assessing the quality of, and the standards applied to, the higher education of registered providers and those providers seeking registration
 - b. the approach to be taken to securing the advice required under section 46 of HERA regarding the quality of, and the standards applied to, higher education of providers for which the OfS is considering granting, varying or revoking authorisation for degree awarding powers
 - c. the way in which the designated quality body has exercised the functions under section 27 and Schedule 4, including:
 - the arrangements for holding the body to account for the performance of the assessment functions
 - considering the annual report by the designated body
 - preparation of the triennial report by the OfS.

Membership

4. The committee shall be appointed by the OfS chair. The chair of QAC must be a non-executive member of the OfS board. QAC shall consist of up to eight members overall and no less than five members which include:
 - Up to three non-executive members of the OfS board (including the QAC chair).
 - A majority of individuals who appear to the OfS to have experience of providing higher education on behalf of an English higher education provider or being responsible for the provision of higher education by such a provider.

- A majority of individuals who are not members of the OfS board.
5. In appointing members the OfS must have regard to the desirability of their being currently engaged at the time of their appointment in the provision of higher education or in being responsible for such provision.
 6. Members are normally appointed for a period of three years. Re-appointment for up to three further years is subject to satisfactory appraisal by the QAC chair and approval by the OfS chair.
 7. A register of declared interests for all members of the QAC will be published on the OfS website. If it is deemed that a member has an actual or perceived conflict of interest then any relevant paper(s) may be withheld or the member asked to leave the meeting for the duration of the discussion at the discretion of the chair. If the conflict of interests is significant or likely to be long-term, then the member may be asked to step down from the committee.
 8. Any three members of the committee, including at least one member of the OfS board, will comprise a quorum for decision making.
 9. All members of the QAC are legally indemnified against negligence by the Department for Education.

Meetings

- The QAC will normally meet at least four times a year. The chair of the QAC may convene additional meetings as they deem necessary, especially during the first year of operation.
- Meetings may be held by correspondence and/or via video or teleconferencing.
- In the absence of the QAC chair, the meeting will be chaired by another member who is also a member of the OfS board.
- While only members have a right to attend, meetings of the QAC will normally be attended by the director of competition and the register and the secretary to the committee.
- The QAC may also require any other officials of the OfS to attend to assist it with its discussions on any matter.

Reporting

- The QAC will formally report in writing to the OfS board after each meeting. This will be complemented, where necessary, by an oral report from the QAC chair at the board meeting.

- QAC meetings shall be minuted and draft minutes circulated to members as soon as possible after the meeting.
- The QAC will provide the OfS board with an annual report summarising its conclusions from the work it has done during the year.
- The terms of reference for the QAC will be reviewed on an annual basis. The OfS board will be asked to approve any changes to the terms of reference.

Other

10. The QAC may set up a sub-committee to provide advice on any of the above issues. The membership and terms of reference of any sub-committee shall be agreed by the QAC chair.
11. The QAC will review its own effectiveness annually and report outcomes to the OfS board.