The quality assurance of higher education in the UK

Carolyn Campbell
Observatory on Borderless Higher Education
Carolyn.Campbell@obhe.ac.uk
The context

• Four national systems of HE in the UK
• Diversity in
  • range of providers
  • modes of delivery
  • delivery locations
  • funding
• Internationalisation – partnerships, new awards, new challenges
• Shared principles and standards in QA
QA of UK HE: from then till now

• Pre 1992
  • Polytechnics: institutional review and accreditation of programmes
  • Universities: external examiners system and emergence of institutional audit (1990)

• 1992-2001 – all universities and funded HEIs
  • Subject review
  • Institutional audit

• 2001- present – all HE providers
  • Institutional review/HE review (HER)/ELIR
The work of QAA - www.qaa.ac.uk

• The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education was established in 1997
• QAA’s mission is to safeguard standards and improve the quality of UK higher education
• QAA does this by:
  • conducting reviews of HE providers
  • publishing reports
  • coordinating and maintaining reference points for quality and academic standards – the UK Quality Code for Higher Education – the ‘Quality Code’.
QAA’s values are

- Integrity
- Professionalism
- Accountability
- Openness
- Independence
UK Quality Code for Higher Education

Part A
• Setting and maintaining threshold academic standards

Part B
• Assuring and enhancing academic quality

Part C
• Information about higher education provision
The Quality Code: components

Explanation

Indicators of sound practice

Expectation:
what higher education providers expect of each other and which students and the public can expect of all higher education providers
Reviews of Higher Education by QAA

- All UK degree awarding institutions
- Other designated higher education institutions
- Further education colleges with HE provision
- Private colleges – with designated courses and/or international students
- Embedded colleges – foundation course providers for international students
- Foreign providers in the UK wishing to recruit international students to their own degrees
- Specialist institutions
The reviewers

- Peer review process – senior academic staff
- Nominations from Vice Chancellors and Principals
- QAA Selection Criteria
- Independent reviewers
- Currency of experience
- Student members of review teams
- International members of review teams
- The QAA Reviewer Community:

http://www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/our-reviewers/
Training of reviewers

• typically a three day residential programme
• a requirement for review

Purpose to:
• assess the suitability of reviewers
• develop the skills of review and reporting
• briefing on the purpose and conduct of reviews
• promote QAA standards and values
• develop team working
Conduct of reviews

A five-stage process:
• Preparation and self evaluation
• Review of documentation
• Institutional visit
• Key findings and reporting
• Action plan post review
An example of judgements: HER

Institutions are assessed on four key aspects
  • Threshold academic standards
  • Academic quality
  • Enhancement
  • Information

Outcomes are defined as
  • Commended
  • Meets UK expectations
  • Requires improvement to meet UK expectations
  • Does not meet UK expectations
Reporting

- Key findings letters – outcomes – to institution
- Published reports – QAA website
- Aimed at a wide audience
- More technical evidence-base
- Checks on accuracy
- Action plans and follow-up
UK QA: international dimensions

- QAA’s membership of international networks- ENQA, INQAAHE and APQN
- QAA inclusion in EQAR
- UK participation in the Bologna Process and EHEA
- QAA’s partnerships with peer agencies in Australia, China, Dubai, Hong Kong, Ireland, Japan, Malaysia and Singapore
- QAA review of non UK providers.
Further information

• www.qaa.ac.uk
• www.universitiesuk.ac.uk
• www.international.ac.uk
• www.enqa.eu
• www.inqaahe.org
• www.apqn.org