

We have close relationships and strategic links with many international quality assurance agencies. We're a full member of ENQA, we're listed on the European Quality Register (EQAR), and we're also one of only 7 agencies worldwide judged to be fully aligned with INQAAHE's Guidelines of Good Practice. We represent the UK in the Qualifications Beyond Boundaries Group (QBBG), a network set up by quality assurance agencies and regulators in seven countries involved in TNE. We're the only Agency ever judged to have been fully compliant with all European Standards and Guidelines.

And of course, QAA has observer status on the Asia-Pacific Quality Network. We are also member of the Cross-Border Quality Assurance Network launched in December 2016 under the Asia-Europe Meetings of Ministers of Education, aimed at building a cooperation platform for stakeholders of cross-border HE quality assurance in Asia and Europe.

QAA's engagement with institutions in Macao started in 2014 with a bespoke review of MPI. This engagement with Macao has continued and QAA has since worked with 6 of the HE institutions in Macao. This includes working with MUST (Macao University of Science and Technology) on the pilot of the DSES (Education Bureau) method for Institutional Quality Audit and the QAA International Quality Review (IQR) for the Macao Institute for Tourism Studies (IFTM).

Some of the areas of commonality internationally from our International Partners' Forum included the use of micro-credentials to assist portability of qualifications, and issues such as digital poverty.

The initial main challenges to emerge included not just the logistical challenge of moving online, but also how to maintain learning outcomes, the best methods of assessment, how to ensure accessibility and improve the student experience. After Easter, we then saw those new challenges emerging in the second phase - there was a need for flexibility among providers, and a focus on the student experience for 2020-21.

The impact of the pandemic on UK HE

The initial emergency sector response was an extraordinary effort - a transition to mass online learning that was both rapid and effective. Universities and colleges showed that, contrary to stereotype, they are able to move quickly, decisively and crucially, collaboratively. There was a real sector interest in maintaining quality and standards online, and in working together to do so.

After Easter, we then saw new challenges emerging in the second phase - there was a need for flexibility among providers, and a focus on admissions and transitions for 2020-21. We were able to produce admissions guidance in May, based on discussions with providers in April. They were scenario-planning then what digitised welcome weeks looked like, working closely with students' unions. They were considering online social and community spaces, and personalised support. There was strong collaboration - for instance, directors of estates across the sector to share knowledge about social distancing requirements on campuses. The discussion about blended learning approaches happened openly and constructively.

After moving out of the emergency transition period, we produced a piece of 'future proofing' guidance. I had conversations with around 150 VCs about what their planning for the next academic year looks like. There was a range of approaches, but underpinning them were four guiding principles.

- 1 That any move to onsite activity is safe and secure for staff and students.
- 2 That degree-awarding bodies maintain quality and standards in the move to flexible provision.
- 3 That providers engage with students and staff in planning changes to delivery and assessment of teaching and learning.
- 4 That provider planning scenarios are flexible and responsive to students' needs

It's important to note that not all providers experience these challenges in the same way. QAA's role

We may see demand increase as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, as more students choose degrees in-country.

TNE has been impacted significantly by the pandemic. We saw different countries affected at different times and governments responding in different ways. The mitigating measures which TNE providers needed to introduce were not universal between countries or over time. We saw providers move to online delivery, bringing the practical challenges of adapting materials and approaches, building staff and student technical expertise, and ensuring the availability and reliability of online tools.

Beyond these practical challenges, there are some more existential questions:

- How do you emphasise the value of TNE provision without learning in a classroom location, and manage too the student experience and student expectation of a UK degree?
- How do you develop a sense of 'UK-ness' online for those considering TNE?

Our advice for UK institutions has been to work proactively and collaboratively with their TNE partners to help support their students, tailoring their approach to each partnership. But looking ahead, part of QAA's role is in exploring new solutions for these questions, working with our international partner bodies and through networks like APQN.

A post-pandemic future

The last thing I would share is that as we move forward, it's important to reflect on what this year has shown us in terms of international partnership in higher education.

We have seen agencies, providers and the international community working together to face the challenge - perhaps more collaboratively than ever before.

In such a complex and rapidly evolving environment, it remains critical that there is deep collaboration across borders in the higher education sector. Agencies must work in partnership with each other and with governments, regulators, institutions and students to ensure that we are prepared for what lies ahead.

In many ways, the pandemic has accelerated trends that were already apparent. Looking ahead, there are questions about micro-credentials and portability, the structure of the academic year, even what institutions should look like in the future.

We are conscious of the potential for positive reforms too (for instance in the UK, developments in lifelong learning, and localised collaboration between providers).

As we look ahead, the approaches we must hold onto are flexibility and collaboration. The initial transition saw a level of collaboration and cooperation that previously might not have been imagined, and that's the basis upon which we were able to provide guidance and continue working together.

Thank you.