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Subject	Consultation on the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, <i>Part A: Setting and maintaining academic standards, The UK frameworks for higher education qualifications.</i>
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Recipients	UK higher education institutions and further education colleges; UK higher education funding councils and representative bodies; higher education student representative bodies; other higher education sector bodies; professional, statutory or regulatory bodies; employer bodies.
Of interest to	Individuals with responsibilities for academic standards, programme design and approval, programme monitoring and review, assessment of students and recognition of prior learning; students, student representatives and staff from student representative bodies; professional, statutory or regulatory bodies; policy makers; and employers.
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Related documents	<u><i>Part A: Setting and maintaining academic standards, The UK frameworks for higher education qualifications - draft for consultation</i></u>

Dear colleague,

I am writing to notify you that we are now consulting on an updated and revised version of the UK frameworks for higher education qualifications, which are formal components of *Part A: Setting and maintaining academic standards* of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code). The document brings together the two frameworks - *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and *The framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland* (FQHEIS) - into a single publication.

The UK frameworks for higher education qualifications provide important reference points for higher education providers, assisting them in setting and maintaining academic standards. They are central to the Expectation in *Chapter A1: The national level* of the Quality Code that degree-awarding bodies use external UK and European reference points to secure threshold academic standards across the higher education sector.

Simultaneous revision of the FHEQ and FQHEIS provides the opportunity to publish the two frameworks together as a single document and emphasise the many features that unite them. By producing one document with a single explanatory text to accompany the frameworks, we intend to reduce duplication and complexity. A single document affords the opportunity to place the levels of the two frameworks side by side to demonstrate their alignment. Higher education providers, staff, students, employers and international

audiences will all benefit from a clearer, more straightforward presentation of the UK position.

Bringing the two frameworks together is a significant change which has been accomplished without necessitating changes of substance to the text of either the FHEQ or FQHEIS. Both documents already contain the same specific guidance on assessment and awarding and naming qualifications. At postgraduate level, the qualifications descriptors of the FHEQ and FQHEIS are common to both frameworks. At undergraduate levels, where qualification descriptors differ, the single document includes all the qualification descriptors of both frameworks. This raises the possibility of greater alignment and harmonisation of qualification descriptors between the two frameworks in the future. There are questions within the [online survey](#) about this potential development.

The online survey also includes a number of questions about proposed modifications to the table that illustrates the typical qualifications at each level of the frameworks. For example, a proposal is made to include, for the first time, primary qualifications in medicine, dentistry and veterinary science. We also ask you to comment on whether the frameworks should accommodate the Juris Doctor award, which is a three-year programme for non-law graduates, originating from the United States of America and adopted increasingly widely across the anglophone academic world.

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) is aware that the context in which the FHEQ and FQHEIS are being updated is one in which the purposes and effectiveness of other UK national qualifications frameworks are under critical scrutiny. Wales is currently reviewing the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales and considering the establishment of Qualifications Wales while Scotland has recently reviewed the overarching level descriptors of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework. Northern Ireland has decided to develop a comparable comprehensive credit and qualifications framework by 2017. The development of these comprehensive frameworks, embracing all educational sectors, is what is required under the European Council's European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning. In a parallel and significant development, Ofqual is undertaking a review of both the Qualifications and Credit Framework and the National Qualifications Framework which together encompass general education and vocational education and training from entry level to level 8. The online survey also invites you to comment on a proposal that QAA should explore with other stakeholders ways by which users of qualifications frameworks in England, including students and employers, could be enabled to make better sense of the full range of higher qualifications available and make appropriate choices. We recognise that this may require a further review of qualifications frameworks in England, in the light of the other developments mentioned here.

The development of each of component of the Quality Code is undertaken by an expert advisory group comprising representatives who work in the relevant area of practice. Members of advisory groups are drawn from different types of higher education providers and relevant sector bodies from across the four nations of the UK.

We welcome contributions to this consultation from anyone with an interest in any or all of the areas covered, including staff with responsibilities for academic standards, programme design and approval, programme monitoring and review, assessment of students and recognition of prior learning; representatives from all four countries; students, student representatives and staff from student representative bodies; sector and representative bodies; professional, statutory or regulatory bodies; and employer groups.

The consultation will be open until the end of Friday 27 June 2014. Please submit responses through the [online survey](#). The final version of the *UK frameworks for higher education*

qualifications will be published at the end of October 2014 and will come into effect as a reference point for the purpose of reviews carried out by QAA from August 2015.

We will be running consultation events during the consultation period. Please see our [website](#) for further details.

If you would like further information relating to this consultation document or consultation process, please contact Sarah Butler s.butler@qaa.ac.uk, Dr Melinda Drowley m.drowley@qaa.ac.uk or Dr David Gale d.gale@qaa.ac.uk.

I look forward to your response to this consultation and to your continued engagement in the development of UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

Yours sincerely



Anthony McClaran
Chief Executive



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