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Subject	College Higher Education subscription to QAA
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Recipients	Existing QAA subscribers
Respond to	QAA: Karen Davies, Enquiries Officer, tel 01452 389637, e-mail enquiries@qaa.ac.uk

Dear Subscriber,

Further education college subscription to QAA

Summary

1 This letter is to notify existing subscribers to QAA that, as from 1 August 2013, all further education colleges (FECs) that provide higher education in England will be required to subscribe to QAA on an annual basis. This is in the context that annual subscription to QAA will become a condition of Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) grant.

Background and key developments

2 HEFCE is legally responsible for ensuring the assessment of the quality of all publicly funded higher education teaching in England. It fulfils this responsibility through a contract with QAA. QAA, acting on behalf of all providers of higher education, safeguards academic standards and supports improvements in quality. This is essential to the maintenance of the reputation of UK higher education, both at home and internationally.

3 This new requirement for subscription to QAA follows the Government's stated policy that all providers of higher education be brought fully within the quality assurance system operated by QAA. In its document *A new, fit-for-purpose regulatory framework for the higher education sector: Technical consultation* (August 2011), the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) stated:

'... all designated providers, as a condition of designation for student support or HEFCE teaching grant, will be required to subscribe to the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) and be subject to the English HE quality assurance arrangements for all eligible courses.'

4 This requirement also recognises that, from 2013-14, all providers of higher education reviewed by QAA will have a common review method: Higher Education Review. As a result, it is now reasonable to expect that all directly funded higher education providers will subscribe on the same basis.

5 As you may be aware, there have been a number of recent changes to how QAA operates quality assurance for FEC providers of higher education on behalf of HEFCE. These changes have been to harmonise arrangements so that, with respect to their higher education provision, FECs have similar obligations and profile to higher education

institutions. These changes reflect the growing maturity of colleges as higher education providers and the Government's frequently stated desire for a 'level playing field' for regulation.

6 FECs have a long-standing role in the provision of higher education, and QAA has both reviewed and supported FECs for several years. FECs have benefitted from, and contributed to, QAA's development and enhancement activities, such as the new UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

7 In May 2012, QAA wrote to all FEC providers of higher education inviting them to subscribe to the agency. QAA now has 21 voluntary FEC subscribers. In October 2012, QAA, in agreement with its company members (Universities UK, GuildHE, Universities Scotland and Higher Education Wales), created a new position on its board to reflect the interests of FECs. Gary Warke, Chief Executive of Hull College Group, was appointed in December 2012.

8 FEC subscribers will have the full benefit of being subscribers to QAA from 1 August 2013. By subscribing to QAA, FECs will be contributing to, and strengthening the reputation of, UK higher education. FEC subscribers will also be able to use the QAA Quality Mark if they have received a positive outcome from a QAA review.

9 QAA's existing subscription band structure for publicly funded higher education institutions is based on the numbers of students in higher education at the institution. The scale of subscription relates to the size of the higher education provision at UK institutions. Those providers with a comparatively small amount of higher education provision will pay less than larger providers. For College Higher Education, QAA will measure size using each institution's 'Higher Education in Further Education: Students Survey' submission, which provides aggregate information about the numbers of students on courses of prescribed higher education at each FEC. For the academic year 2013-14, QAA shall use verified student data for 2012-13.

10 QAA is reviewing its services for all of its subscribers so that it can meet the needs of the full range of higher education providers with whom it works, and will shortly be issuing a survey to all existing subscribers as part of this process. The existing range of subscriber services provided is on QAA's website www.qaa.ac.uk under About us/Subscribing institutions.

11 QAA looks forward to continuing to work in partnership with you to ensure all higher education providers enhance the reputation of UK higher education and provide a high-quality learning experience for students.

Yours sincerely,



Anthony McClaran
Chief Executive



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