



Department
for Education

Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education: de- designation

Government consultation

Launch date 8 February 2023

Respond by 3 March 2023

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Introduction

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) is the designated quality body (DQB) under the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 (HERA). The Office for Students (OfS) may ask the DQB to assess the quality of, and the standards applied to, higher education provided by:

- a) institutions who have applied to join the OfS register, for the purposes of determining whether they satisfy any initial registration conditions applicable to them relating to quality and standards; and
- b) registered higher education providers for the purposes of determining whether they satisfy any ongoing registration conditions applicable to them relating to quality and standards.

It also provides advice to the OfS regarding the quality of, and the standards applied to, higher education provided by providers in connection with the grant, variation or revocation of providers' degree awarding powers.

Reason for this consultation

On 20th July 2022, the QAA announced that it will no longer consent to be the DQB after the current DQB year ends on 31st March 2023.

Under paragraph 5(4) of Schedule 4 to HERA, the Secretary of State is required to consult before removing the designation of a DQB, even where the DQB has requested the removal of the designation.

If the QAA's designation is removed as requested, the OfS has confirmed that, from 1 April 2023, it will undertake all quality and standards assessment activity on an interim basis pending further consideration of future arrangements. During this period, we anticipate that the OfS will need to charge providers fees for assessments, as the QAA currently does. In parallel, and subject to the outcome of this consultation, the DfE and OfS will consider options for long-term arrangements. As part of these considerations the OfS may consult about whether there is a body that is suitable to perform the assessment functions, as provided for under paragraph 1(1) of Schedule 4 to HERA.

Public Sector Equality Duty

We do not anticipate that there will be any material or adverse equality impact associated with this decision.

Subject to the outcome of this consultation, should the Secretary of State decide to remove QAA's designation, the assessment functions would be performed by the OfS. In performing these functions, the OfS will continue to ensure that providers continue to be held to its rigorous requirement for quality and standards. When performing its functions, including in conducting assessment activity, the OfS will continue to have appropriate regard to all relevant legal duties and its published policies, including the Public Sector Equality Duty.

This change does not impact on the Department's ability to comply with its equality duties.

Who this is for

- The OfS
- Registered higher education providers
- Persons representing, or promoting the interests of, students on higher education courses provided by registered higher education providers
- Persons representing, or promoting the interests of, employers of graduates

Issue date

The consultation was issued on 8 February 2023.

Enquiries

If your enquiry is related to the policy content of the consultation you can email:

DQB.Consultation@education.gov.uk

If your enquiry is related to the DfE e-consultation website or the consultation process in general, you can contact the DfE Ministerial and Public Communications Division by email: Consultations.Coordinator@education.gov.uk or by telephone: 0370 000 2288 or via the [DfE Contact us page](#).

Additional copies

Additional copies are available electronically and can be downloaded from [GOV.UK DfE consultations](#).

The response

The results of the consultation and the department's response will be [published on GOV.UK](#) in March 2023.

About this consultation

This consultation document makes one proposal: that the designation of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education as designated quality body under Schedule 4 to the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 should be removed.

We would like to hear your views on our proposal.

Respond online

To help us analyse the responses please use the online system wherever possible. Visit [DfE consultations on GOV.UK](#) to submit your response.

Other ways to respond

If for exceptional reasons, you are unable to use the online system, for example because you use specialist accessibility software that is not compatible with the system, you may request and complete a word document version of the form.

By email

- DQB.Consultation@education.gov.uk

By post

Higher Education Quality and Regulation Team
Department for Education
Ground Floor
20 Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

Deadline

The consultation closes on 3 March 2023.

De-designation of the QAA as the DQB

Background

The background is set out in full in the introduction to this consultation.

Please note: this consultation relates to the removal of the designation of the QAA as the DQB. Whilst contextual information is provided on the reasons for the de-designation and interim arrangements, **this consultation is not seeking views on future arrangements.**

Proposal and rationale

This consultation document makes one proposal: that the designation of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) as designated quality body under Schedule 4 to the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 (HERA) should be removed.

The QAA has notified the Secretary of State for Education that it will no longer consent to be the DQB after the current DQB year ends on 31st March 2023.

Under paragraph 4(4) of Schedule 4 to HERA, one of the conditions of suitability to perform the assessment functions is that the DQB consents to being designated.

Under paragraph 5(3) of Schedule 4 to HERA, the Secretary of State may remove the designation of the DQB if:

- a) the Secretary of State is satisfied that removing the designation would be appropriate for securing the effective assessment of the quality of, and the standards applied to, higher education provided by English higher education providers;
- b) the Secretary of State is satisfied that the designated body is failing to perform in an effective manner its functions under section 46 of HERA; or
- c) the designated body consents to the removal of the designation.

Under paragraph 5(4) of Schedule 4 to HERA, the Secretary of State is required to consult before removing the designation of a DQB, even where the DQB has requested, and consents to, the removal of the designation.

If the QAA's designation is removed as requested, the OfS has confirmed that, from 1 April 2023, it will undertake all quality and standards assessments on an interim basis.

Question: Do you agree that the designation of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education as the designated quality body for higher education in England should be removed, on the basis set out above?



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for Education

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