Response to QAA consultation on the future of the Academic Infrastructure

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the consultation on the future of the 'Academic Infrastructure'.

In general terms, the University of Glasgow is strongly supportive of the proposals. The establishment of clear, accessible statements, simply structured and in plain language of what the sector does to assure and enhance quality and to maintain standards has the potential to be of considerable benefit.

The University comments as follows on the consultation questions.

Question 1 - Definitions of standards and quality

The definition of 'standards' might be strengthened by converting sentence 2, which is an assertion into a proper definition, perhaps using the formulation '…the threshold level of achievement will be close to the exact same across the UK.'

The use of the term 'management' in the definition of quality should also be reconsidered. The connotations of this term could have the effect of inappropriately constraining consideration of quality assurance and enhancement in themselves. It also seems at odds with the terminology being considered for expressing judgements in the proposed Institutional review method for England and N Ireland. It is possible to address this concern and save the intention of the sentence by re-wording as: 'Academic quality is a way of describing how well learning opportunities are made available to students to help them achieve their award.'

Beyond the exact terms used to define these key concepts, however, we welcome the establishment of single, standard definitions for these terms. This will help with the important task of clarifying what the sector does to maintain standards and assure and enhance quality.

Question 2 – Restructuring the Academic infrastructure into a single Code of Practice

We strongly support the conversion of the current AI into a single Code of Practice.

The proposed protocol for developing the new Code seems reasonable. The reassurance that it will not involve extensive revisions to content that would impose further burdens on the sector is welcome.

Separation of quality and standards has limited validity, given their inextricable relationship, but we recognise that there is need to structure the document according to some clear principle. We

recognize also that the proposed structure assists with the desire to make clear public statements concerning the range of activities carried out by the sector to maintain standards and maintain and enhance quality.

The identification of what is essential and what is optional will assist the sector, notably in the context of institutional review. It is vital that an appropriate balance is maintained between prescription and institutional freedom to pursue legitimately diverse missions.

Question 3 – Credit frameworks and information

Requirements for public information to be produced by Scottish universities have not yet been determined. It will be essential that the Code takes account of and supports variation across the UK countries.

Question 4 – Likely effectiveness of the proposed Code of Practice and its title

The proposed title is appropriate. 'Academic Infrastructure' is neither a wholly appropriate nor a readily comprehensible label.

The proposed approach has the potential to benefit the sector considerably by improving stakeholder understanding of standards and quality. The simplification of the current AI is particularly welcomed; this will also aid sector staff identification with the Code.

QAA recognition is also welcome that the new Code is important but not a complete response to the need to 'explain ourselves'. A good communications strategy will be key here, through development of the QAA website, etc. We also recognise that effective communication in this context is a task for the sector as well as QAA.