



# The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

The quality assurance of Cross-Border Higher  
Education: an UK perspective

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# Structure of the presentation

- The UK regulatory context for quality assurance
- The UK CBHE landscape
- The QAA's approach to quality assuring CBHE
- Key challenges for CBHE and its quality assurance
- Examples of good practice

# Sources of information

Publicly available data and information

QAA's own experience and documents

Interviews with 7 stakeholders

4 HE providers, 2 professional bodies, 1 sector body

# The regulatory context

- There is no general higher education law in the UK
- However, each UK degree must be awarded by a legally approved degree-awarding body
- Degree-awarding bodies are recognised but not owned by the state
  - They are free to award their own degrees, including overseas, and have ultimate responsibility for quality and standards
- QAA is contracted by the UK funding councils to review and report on how well the degree-awarding bodies they fund fulfil their responsibility

# The Quality Assurance Agency

QAA's mission is to safeguard standards and improve the quality of UK higher education **wherever** it is delivered around the world

Working with the sector, QAA develops reference points and review HE providers against them

QAA's review activity extends beyond publicly funded provision, including cross-border provision

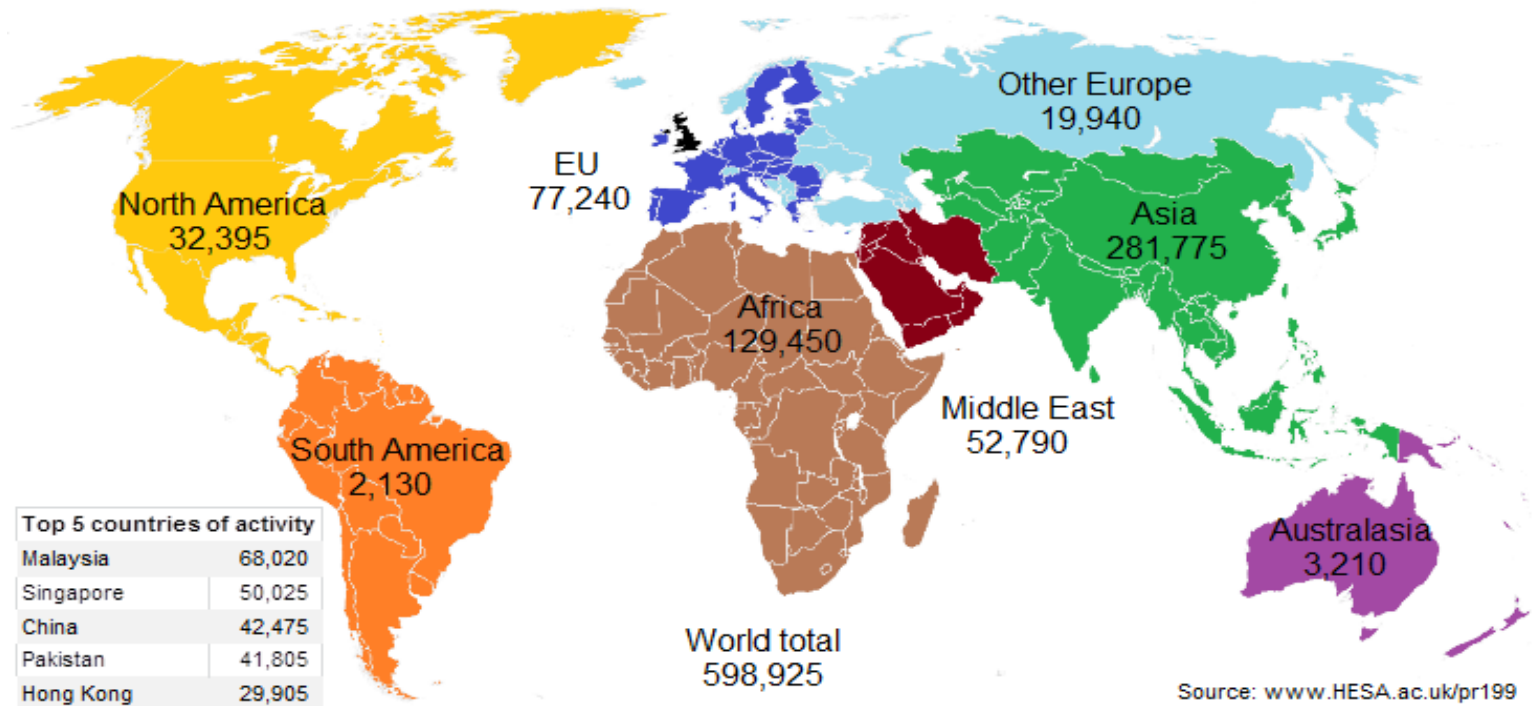
QAA does not undertake programme accreditation, professional bodies do

# The landscape of UK CBHE

- Over 75% of UK HE providers are now involved in some form of CBHE
- In 2012-13, there were 598,925 students on UK CBHE, a 5% increase from 2011-12
  - The number of international students in the UK (425,260) decreased 2%
  - The number of students studying in the UK (2,340,275) decreased 6%
- Caveats:
  - Data limited to publicly funded degree-awarding bodies
  - ~45% of all students are on a single programme offered by Oxford Brookes in partnership with ACCA as a top-up via distance learning
  - Data relate to headcount rather than full-time equivalent

# Distribution of UK CBHE

Students studying wholly overseas by geographic region of activity 2012/13



# BIS' international education strategy

*'to make it possible for people to access a wide choice of UK education in their own countries – and to do so with confidence that they are getting a quality product and a recognised qualification'*

In 2013/14, QAA and the UK HE International Unit consulted with the sector on how to strengthen the quality assurance of CBHE

Currently a working group is looking at how to implement the outcomes of the consultation



# QAA's approach to CBHE

- Institutional reviews in the UK are supplemented by dedicated reviews of UK CBHE
- So far we have adopted a country-based approach
  - India (2009-10), Malaysia (2010-11), Singapore (2011-12), China (2012-13), the UAE (2013-14), the Caribbean (2014-15)
- The UK Quality Code's expectation
  - 'degree-awarding bodies have ultimate responsibility for academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities, **regardless** of where these opportunities are delivered and who provides them' (Chapter B10)
- Informed by international guidelines
  - QAA liaises regularly with counterpart agencies to 'facilitate the QA of CBHE while respecting the QA systems of receiving countries' (OECD)

# Challenges: a QAA perspective

Striking a balance between risk-based scrutiny and quality enhancement

Striking a balance between desk-based analysis and overseas visits

Better aligning institutional review and CBHE review

Improving the information base

Adopting a flexible approach to take into account local cultural norms (e.g. student engagement)

# Challenges: a providers' perspective

- Cultural distance
  - a role for QAA & sector organisations in promoting an understanding of UK QA overseas, and providing an information service to the sector
- Geographical distance
  - finding mechanisms of working effectively with partners who are geographically removed and in different time zones
- Adequate and specialist staff capacity
  - need to have and train adequate and specialist resources for setting-up and managing CBHE arrangements
- Regulatory jungles
  - e.g. complexity of local approval procedures, obstacles to the recognition of CBHE qualifications, conflicting demands, PSRBs reluctance

# Good practice: an external QA perspective

Collaborate with host country QA bodies in every stage of the review of CBHE (QAA):

e.g. sharing information, briefing review teams, facilitating logistics, observing reviews, providing input to review meetings' agendas, and coordinating communication strategy

Monitor the impact of the students' transition to the UK on both students and UK providers (GPhC):

e.g. send reviewers to meet with CBHE students in the UK and talk with staff about the impact of their coming to the UK

# Good practice: a providers' perspective

- A central office for managing, developing and supporting all partnerships
- Targeted support for larger and more complex collaborative partners
- All partners' events
- A coordinated approach to programme delivery across a plurality of sites globally
- A student-centred due-diligence process for establishing CBHE arrangements