

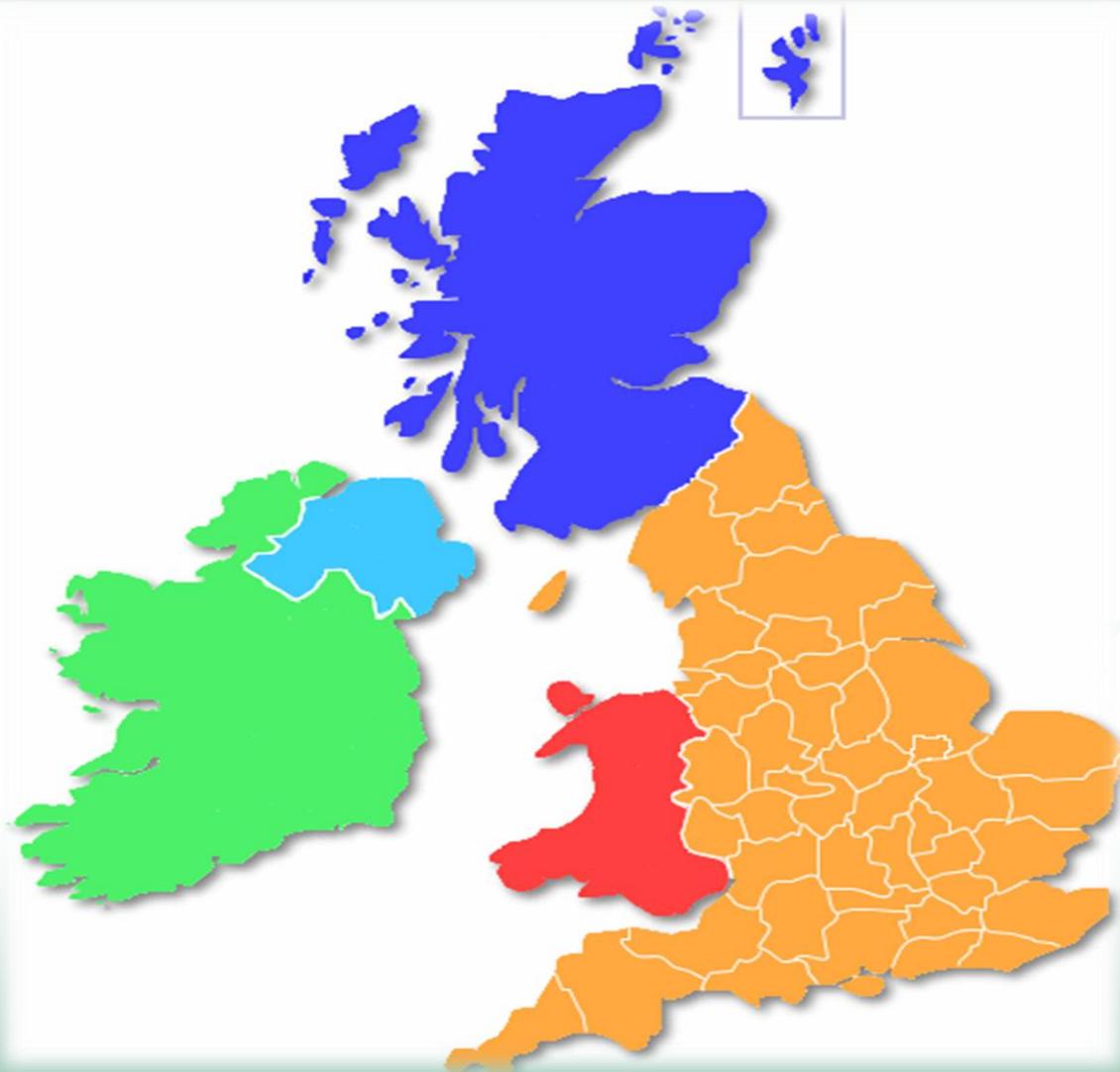
National qualifications frameworks and their links to quality assurance

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**INQAAHE 2013 conference:
Managing diversity: sustainable quality assurance**

UK higher education



About the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)

- Established in 1997
- A not for profit company limited by guarantee
- UK-wide remit
- Funded (at circa £12 million per annum) by
 - **subscriptions** from universities and colleges
 - **contracts** with the higher education funding councils
- Offices in Gloucester, London, Cardiff and Glasgow
- ~ 170 staff (plus >700 reviewers)
- Board made up of 16 members, 6 officers and 4 observers

The role of the QAA

- mission to **safeguard standards and improve the quality of UK higher education**
- work with higher education (HE) providers to develop reference documents and guidance which are used by all HE providers
- conduct reviews and publish reports detailing the findings of those reviews
- advisor to Government on applications for degree-awarding powers and university titles
- advisor to the UK Border Agency (UKBA) on ‘Highly Trusted Sponsor’ status for HE institutions

Safeguarding standards and improving the quality of higher education



UK Quality Code
for Higher Education

Chapters of the Quality Code

Part A: Setting and maintaining threshold academic standards

- A1: The national level
- A2: The subject and qualification level
- A3: The programme level
- A4: Approval and review
- A5: Externality
- A6: Assessment of achievement of learning outcomes

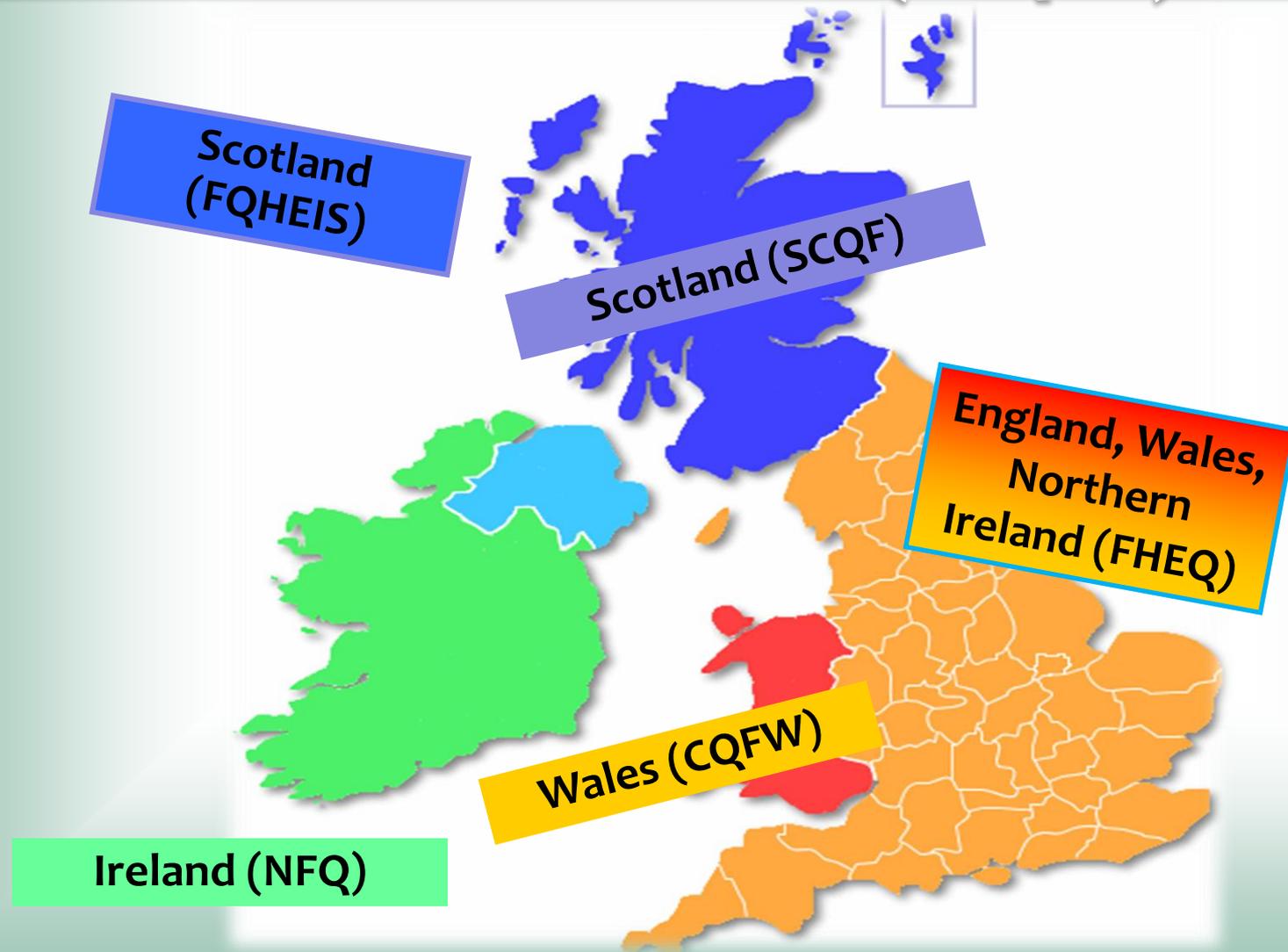
Part C: Information about higher education provision

Part B: Assuring and enhancing academic quality

- B1: Programme design and approval
- B2: Admissions
- B3: Learning and teaching
- B4: Enabling student development and achievement
- B5: Student engagement
- B6: Assessment of students and accreditation of prior learning
- B7: External examining
- B8: Programme monitoring and review
- B9: Complaints and appeals
- B10: Managing higher education provision with others
- B11: Research degrees

General introduction

National qualifications frameworks (NQFs)



UK Quality Code for Higher Education

Part A

- Setting and maintaining threshold academic standards

Part B

- Assuring and enhancing academic quality

Part C

- Information about higher education provision

Expectations:

Things higher education providers expect of each other and which the general public can expect of all higher education providers

Indicators:
of sound practice

Quality Code and QAA review methods

- Institutional Review (England and Northern Ireland)
- Review of College Higher Education and Initial Review (England)
 - **To be replaced by Higher Education Review**
- Institutional Review (Wales)
- Enhancement-led Institutional Review (Scotland)
- Review for Educational Oversight (UK)
- Transnational Education Review

Outcomes of external quality assurance

An analysis of:

- 59 external quality assurance reviews (2004 – 2006)
- 76 external quality assurance reviews (2007 – 2009)

Concluded that:

- HE institutions engaged in a positive manner with the qualification frameworks
- the qualifications frameworks had become firmly embedded in HE institutions internal quality assurance processes

'Qualifications can cross boundaries'

A rough guide to comparing qualifications in the UK and Ireland

The leaflet:

- provides information about the ways qualifications are organised in the UK and Ireland.

It shows, for the UK and Ireland:

- the main stages of education or employment
 - the qualifications framework for each country
 - types of qualifications offered in each country
 - broad comparability between similar kinds of qualifications offered in each country
-
- illustrates how UK and Ireland qualifications frameworks relate to qualifications frameworks in Europe.



Lessons learnt

Regular liaison about the relationships between the various qualifications frameworks and their alignment has achieved:

- improved clarity about HE qualifications and how they relate to each other,
- a clearer understanding of the NQFs operating across the four countries of the UK and Ireland.
- clear information and a simple guide
- confirmation of the compatibility, and hence recognition and acceptability, of HE awards across national and international boundaries

Summary

- involve the HE sector in developing and revising NQFs
- NQFs cannot drive educational reform in isolation
- the shift to a learning outcomes approach takes time to embed
- implementation of NQFs needs to be realistic in order to secure confidence
- staff, students and employers require support in understanding the implications of a learning outcomes based approach and the adoption of NQFs
- information and advice needs to be targeted at specific stakeholder needs

Conclusion

NQFs provide a useful transparency tool and form an essential component of quality assurance mechanisms.

NQFs are an important for the recognition and comparability of qualifications across national boundaries.

A variety of approaches are required to ensure effective collaboration and consultation among the partners of higher education involved in national qualifications frameworks.

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