



**Council**  
**1 November 2017**  
**Quality Assurance contract renewal**

<b>Classification</b>	Public
<b>Purpose</b>	For decision
<b>Issue</b>	The extension of our current contract for quality assurance services from August 2018 to August 2020 with the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA).
<b>Recommendation</b>	To agree to extend our existing contract for quality assurance services with the QAA from August 2018 to July 2020.
<b>Financial and resourcing implications</b>	Our quality assurance services costs are calculated on an 'activity' basis. The cost over the last three years has been approximately £186,000 but this varies depending on the quality assurance activity that takes place each year. Some minor changes are expected to the contract schedule to take account of an increase in inflation but overall, the changes fit within the expected budget envelope from August 2018 onwards.
<b>Equality and diversity implications</b>	None
<b>Communications implications</b>	The decision to extend the contract with the QAA will be communicated to the QAA and published on our website.
<b>Annexes</b>	None
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## Background

1. The GOsC has a statutory duty to 'recognise qualifications' or withdraw the recognition of qualifications granted by an educational institution, thus ensuring that only graduates meeting the *Osteopathic Practice Standards* are awarded a 'recognised qualification' (RQ). The possession of a 'recognised qualification' entitles the applicant to apply for registration with the GOsC.
2. The mechanisms that we use for recognising qualifications (or withdrawing recognition) include:
  - The drafting of the RQ specification to inform a Visit (these visits currently take place every five years or so for existing institutions. They may take place every three years for a new institution or if there are particular concerns in provision. Monitoring visits can take place at any time at the direction of the Committee<sup>1</sup> if the concerns are such that the Committee can only establish whether or not the *Osteopathic Practice Standards* are being delivered through verification mechanisms of a Visit. The RQ specification enables the Committee to specify the areas to be explored as part of the Visit (see s12(5) Osteopaths Act 1993).
  - Visits by a team of Visitors appointed by the Committee (see s12 of the Osteopaths Act 1993)
  - The drafting of a report
  - A statutory period of not less than one month for comment (see s12 of the Osteopaths Act 1993)
  - Consideration of the report at the Committee and a recommendation to Council to recognise the qualification (see s14 Osteopaths Act 1993)
  - Consideration of the report at Council and a decision to recognise the qualification (see s14 Osteopaths Act 1993)
  - Approval of the decision of Council by the Privy Council (see s14 of the Osteopaths Act 1993).
3. Alongside such a process, there are a range of matters to ensure the quality and integrity of this process including:
  - Development and implementation of a range of policies and procedures to support the Visit process
  - Recruitment, selection and appointment of Visitors

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<sup>1</sup> Committee means the Policy Advisory Committee sitting as the Education Committee as set out in sections 11 to 16 of the Osteopaths Act 1993.

- Appraisal
  - Training – both annual face to face training and online refresher training.
  - Evaluation
4. We also have other mechanisms to ensure the quality of courses and qualifications which enable standards to be monitored between visits. These include:
- Annual Report requests and analysis (including third party information, for example, external examiner reports, analysis of staff, student and patient feedback and annual programme monitoring reports)
  - Management of concerns
  - Identification and sharing of good practice
  - Dialogue
  - Thematic reviews
  - General conditions: reporting of general matters which may impact on the delivery of the *Osteopathic Practice Standards* and mechanisms for managing and monitoring such issues (issues which may suggest risk. Examples include changes in senior management, curriculum, assessment and so forth).
  - Specific conditions or other requirements identified by the Committee which may impact on delivery of the *Osteopathic Practice Standards* (matters related to risk specific to that institution) and mechanisms for managing and monitoring such issues.
5. The contract for quality assurance services deals primarily with the five yearly visits and the annual reports analysis. But we work closely on all aspects of quality assurance with the QAA so that our quality assurance recommendations and decisions, processes and procedures are seamless and support the Committee in robust and independent quality decision making.
6. In 2009, the General Osteopathic Council appointed the QAA to undertake the management of the visit process. The contract was renewed following a waiver of our procurement rules by Council.
7. In 2014, the General Osteopathic Council (GOsC) undertook a major tender exercise for quality assurance services. Due to the size of the contract, the invitation to tender was subject to EU procurement rules and minimum requirements in relation to advertising etc. The GOsC sought expert advice to

ensure that it complied with the technical requirements. The procurement process took just under one year to complete.

8. In 2015, following this major tender exercise, the GOsC appointed the QAA for a period of three years renewable for a further two years. The contract began in August 2015 and the first three year term expires in July 2018. This means that we need to make a decision whether or not to extend the contract now to allow sufficient time to put in place alternative options.
9. This contract also provides for contribution to the development and implementation of a New Quality Assurance Framework. This was originally scheduled for 2016. However, GOsC rescheduled this to begin in 2017 because of reduced staff resources.
10. On 10 October 2017, the Policy Advisory Committee considered the options for quality assurance services from August 2018 onwards. The Committee considered the arguments for extending the contract with the QAA, (including consideration of the QAA contract evaluation report and feedback), retendering the contract at this three year point and bringing quality assurance services in-house. The Committee did not identify any other available options.
11. The Committee was provided with the QAA's self-evaluation but suggested that Council should be provided with further detail about the Executive's view of the QAA's performance against key performance indicators for the contract. We have provided further information below about performance under the contract.
12. The Committee also encouraged the Executive to consider further options for an innovative quality assurance commissioning process when the contract is retendered in two years' time. This will form part of the PAC's ongoing work programme.
13. This paper asks the Council to agree to extend the contract for quality assurance services with the QAA from August 2018 to July 2020.

## **Discussion**

14. Since the establishment of the contract in August 2015, the following activity has been undertaken by the QAA in accordance with contractual requirements:
  - Contract manager services – available for regular meetings, progress updates on current activity and independent advice (August 2015 to date)
  - Recruitment of additional osteopathic Visitors to pool to ensure that higher intensity of Visits cycle could be maintained (November 2016)
  - Visitor appraisals for 11 Visitors (December 2016) and incorporation of feedback into contract evaluation report dated March 2017
  - Annual refresher training (March 2016)

- New Visitor and Annual Refresher training (March 2017)
- Annual Report analysis for 10 institutions (January 2016)
- Annual Report Analysis for eight institutions (January 2017)
- Contract evaluation report (incorporating feedback from OEIs, Visitors and review co-ordinators involved in the process) (March 2017)
- One unplanned Initial Recognition Review (beginning in April 2016 with agreement of Visitors; SED analysis in July 2016; Visit taking place in October 2016 and delivery of RQ report for Committee in December 2016).
- Four renewal of recognition reviews (two beginning in Beginning in December 2015 with agreement of Visitors; SED analysis in Mar 2016; Visit taking place in June 2016 and delivery of report for September 2016 and two beginning in Beginning in April 2017 with agreement of Visitors; SED analysis in July 2017; Visit taking place in October 2017 and planned delivery of report for December 2017).
- Planning for two further renewal of recognition reviews beginning in October 2017 with agreement of Visitors; SED analysis in Jan 2018; Visit taking place in April 2018 and delivery of report for June 2018.
- One unscheduled monitoring review which began in September 2015 and concluded with the delivery of the RQ monitoring visit report in December 2015)

*Performance against the existing contract*

15. In making a decision to extend the existing contract, Council will want to be assured that performance has been satisfactory and whether there are any reasons that the contract should not be extended. It is the view of the Executive that performance has been satisfactory and that there are no reasons that the contract should not be extended. The reasons for this view are outlined below.
16. The contract evaluation is undertaken by the QAA under the contract. It is in essence, the quality monitoring report of the QAA which is underpinned from evidence from stakeholders. The evaluation identifies the activities undertaken in accordance with the contract from August 2015 to March 2017 both in terms of the required activities being undertaken at the right time (quantitative – the activities outlined in the contract schedule were delivered to required deadlines) and the required activities being undertaken to the expected quality (qualitative – evidenced by feedback from stakeholders including the osteopathic educational institutions, the Visitors and the contract reviewers – but also by the Committee and the Executive).

17. Council will also note that during this period, additional work was also agreed and undertaken to support (and to continue to support) a new provider which was not anticipated at the date of the signing of the contract and also the support to a provider requiring a monitoring visit.
18. All work undertaken in partnership with the QAA takes place to agreed timescales, which can be varied by agreement between the parties. The Executive can confirm that all required activities as outlined in paragraph 14 were undertaken to required deadlines, meeting statutory requirements. They were also undertaken to the required quality.
19. The Executive and the QAA have held regular meetings throughout the period of the contract to review the contract and progress with each OEI. The Executive has also benefitted from the QAA expertise in other review methods to ensure the independence and integrity of our own recommendations to the Committee. The Committee considered particular examples evidencing this.
20. The Executive view is that the QAA has evidenced good performance against the current contract.
21. There are a number of options for quality assurance moving forward. For each option, the Policy Advisory Committee considered an overview along with reasons for and against each of the options. The Committee did not identify additional options or consider any additional arguments for the options. A copy of this paper incorporating the specific arguments for and against the other options is available on request from Fiona Browne at [fbrowne@osteopathy.org.uk](mailto:fbrowne@osteopathy.org.uk).

### *Next steps*

22. Taking into account performance under the existing contract, it is recommended that Council agrees to extend the contract for a further two years from August 2018 to July 2020. The specific reasons for this are:
  - Delivery of contract requirements as evidenced by contract evaluation and Committee papers.
  - Extensive experience in the UK and international quality assurance sector (higher education and other environments offering higher education).
  - Accreditation by the [European Association in Quality Assurance](#) (ENQA) (subject to external quality assurance expertise) providing assurance of credibility in the European sector.
  - Existing knowledge and work on the GOsC/QAA review and consultation planned for 2018.

- Independence of quality assurance process in small, competitive, commercial environment.
- A revised contract schedule shows no significant cost increases, although some uplift for inflation has been included.
- Limited resources to undertake a full tender exercise a year earlier than planned.

23. While there are other options, any benefits of those options are outweighed by the cost and resource disadvantages at this stage. Further, we see no reason to alter the original intention to contract for a five year period at this stage.

**Recommendation:** to agree to extend our existing contract quality assurance services with the QAA from August 2018 to July 2020.