# Incentivising Excellence – Academic Standards
# EPC Annual Congress
# 13 April 2010

- In current QAA audit methodology, 'Academic standards' describe the level of achievement that a student has to reach to gain an award (for example, a degree).

- 'Academic quality' is a way of describing how well the learning opportunities available to students help them to achieve their award.

- Institutions themselves are responsible for managing and maintaining quality and standards. QAA conducts an external review to provide public assurance that institutions are doing this effectively; we also have an enhancement role and share good practice across the sector.

- Current arrangements are based on fundamental recognition of autonomy and independence of HEIs – but recognising the need to safeguard the public interest in the standards and quality of HE.

- The Academic Infrastructure is a nationally agreed set of reference points which give all institutions a shared starting point for setting, describing and assuring the quality and standards of their higher education courses. It is currently under evaluation. There are four components:

  1. The frameworks for higher education qualifications (FHEQs).
  2. *The Code of Practice*.
  3. Subject benchmark statements.
  4. Programme specifications.

- Challenges in assuring academic standards:

  o Criticism that QAA doesn't monitor standards directly.
  o Desire for direct comparability of standards.

- Future direction as set out in *Higher Ambitions:*

  o Students need to play a greater role in assuring standards and quality.
  o Reviewing and developing complaints procedure to ensure responsiveness to serious concerns.
  o Students need

    a) to be aware of QAA and that it assures standards, and
    b) better quality information to help inform their choices.

- Challenge to QAA to improve its public engagement: by reforming QAA's communication we will raise awareness about academic standards and quality, and their importance in sustaining excellence.

- Four national reviews will have major impact on future quality system:

  o Review of audit method for England and N.I.
  o Review of external examining.
  o Development of set of public information to be published by HEIs.
  o Review of Academic Infrastructure.