

# QAA Institutional Audit – Experiencing the Lighter Touch

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# Overview

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- **Institutional Audit**
  - Aims and Objectives
- **The Audit Process**
  - Preparing for Audit
  - Briefing Visit & Main Audit Visit
  - Report and Follow Up
- **Reflections and Conclusions**

# Background to Institutional Audit

- **Introduced in England in 2002-03**
- **Replaces previous procedures based on Continuation Audit (institutional level) and Subject Review (departmental level)**
- **Promises a 'Lighter Touch'**
  - **Builds on the outcomes of Subject Review**
  - **Relies on internal HEI Quality Procedures**

# Aims

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**The Institutional Audit process aims to demonstrate that English universities and colleges are:**

- Providing higher education, awards and qualifications that are both of an acceptable quality and an appropriate academic standard**
- Exercising their legal powers to award degrees in a proper manner**

# Objectives

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- **To contribute to the promotion and enhancement of high quality in teaching and learning**
- **To ensure that students and others have access to reliable and meaningful public information about HEIs and the extent to which they meet national expectations in terms of academic quality and standards**

## Objectives (contd)

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- To ensure that if the standards or quality of HE programmes are found to be weak or deficient, swift action will be taken to improve them
- To secure accountability for the use of public funds

# The Audit Process Examines:

- The effectiveness of the Institution's internal QA procedures
- The accuracy, completeness and reliability of information about quality & standards
- The Institution's QA processes at work at the level of the programme (Discipline Audit Trails – DATs) or across the institution as a whole (Thematic Enquiries)

# How Light is the Lighter Touch?

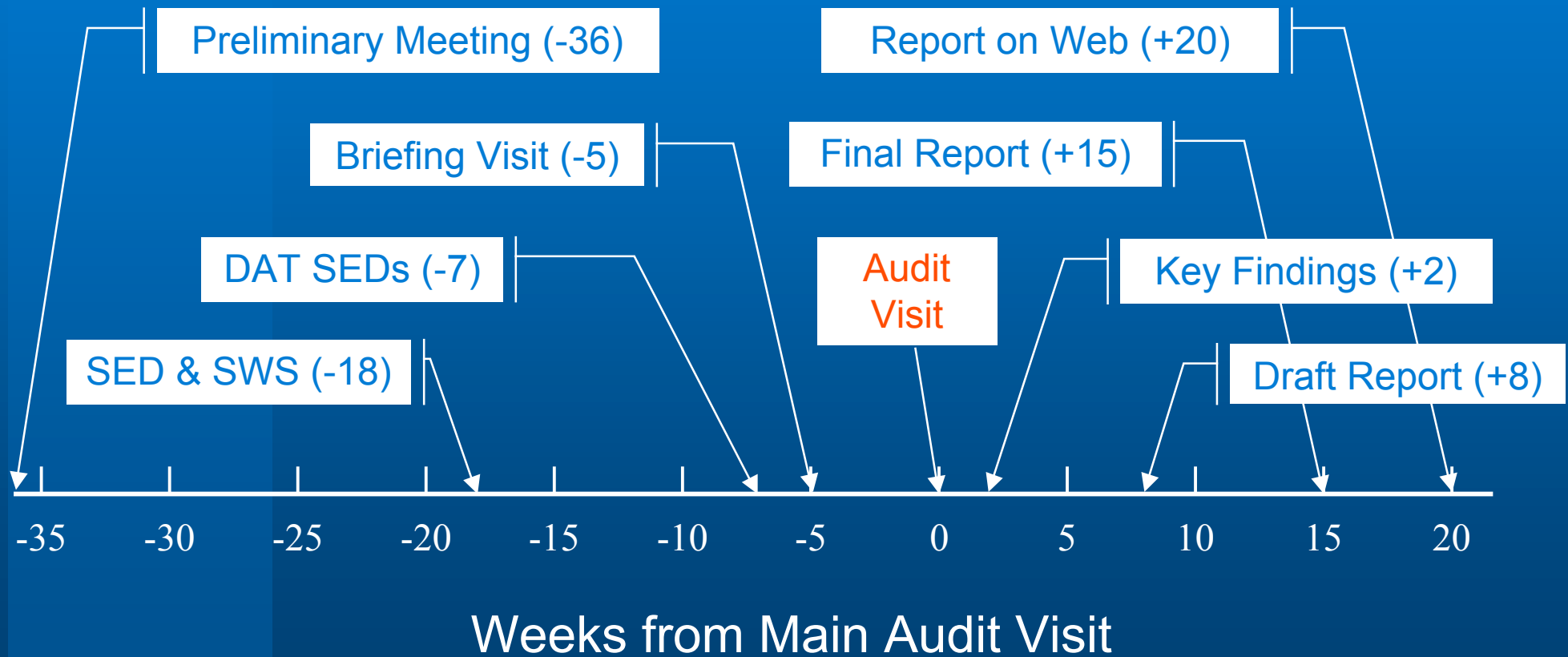
- To gauge the impact of Institutional Audit on a typical HEI, we introduce a new metric - the Randall Scale
- Like the Richter Scale this is a method for registering the magnitude of an event (i.e. energy expended or disturbance caused) on a logarithmic scale



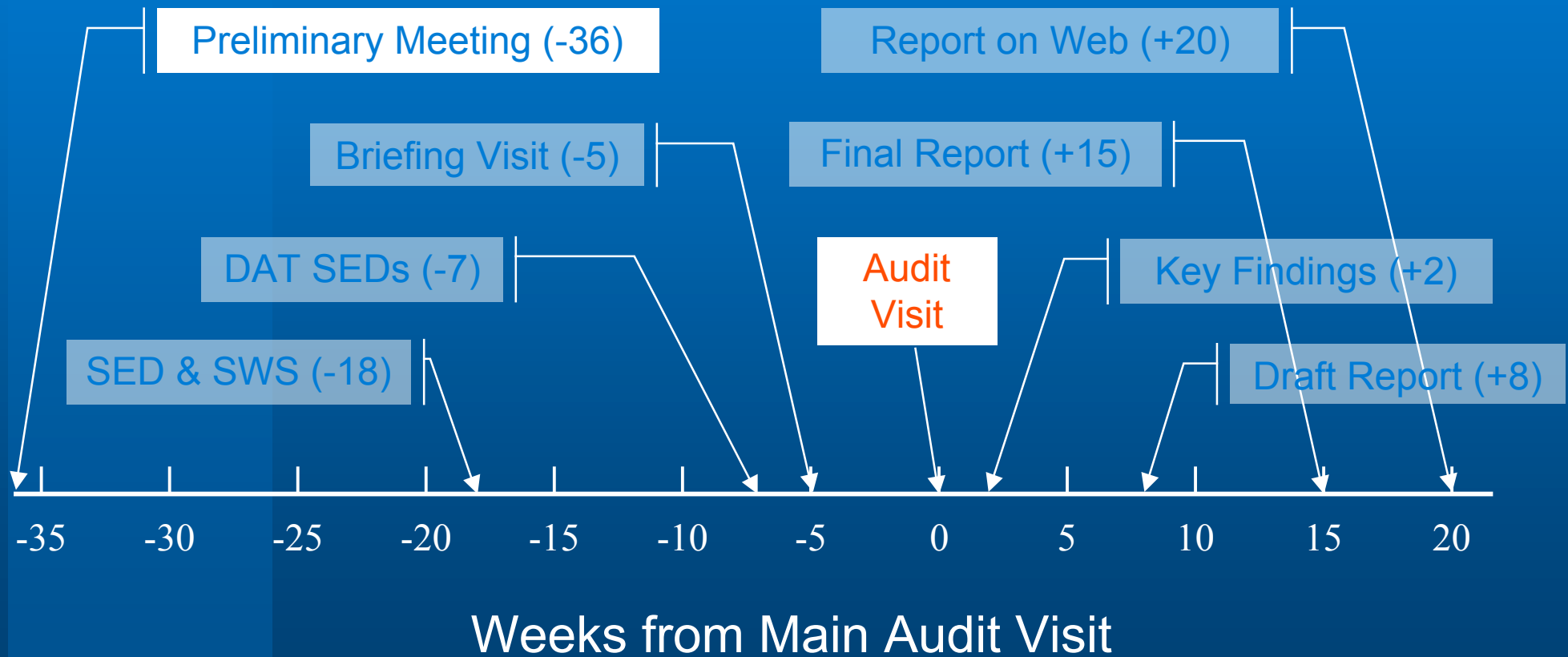
# The Randall Scale

Randall Magnitude	Impact on HEI
< 3.5	Generally not felt
3.5 – 5.5	Often felt; little disruption or upheaval
< 6.0	Reverberations felt across the HEI
6.1 – 6.9	Significant impact in terms of time and effort; large numbers affected
7.0 – 7.9	Major event – few escape unscathed
> 8.0	Catastrophic – the end is nigh!

# Institutional Audit - Timeline



# The Preliminary Meeting

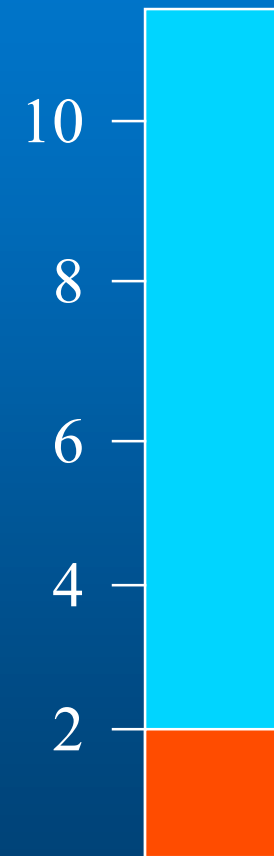


# The Audit Process - 1

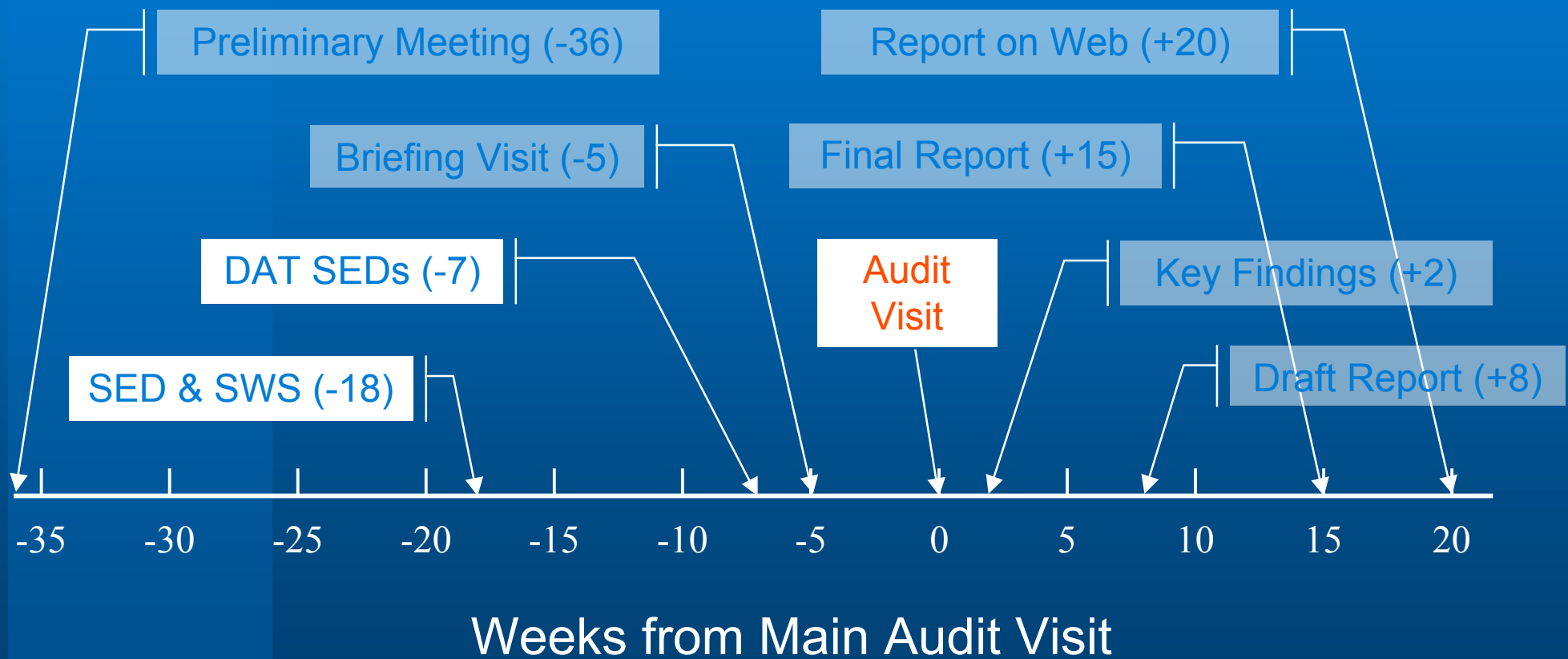
- **The Preliminary Meeting**
  - About 9 months before the audit visit
  - QAA representative (Assistant Director – AD) meets with HEI staff to discuss the scope of the visit, documentation required and possible Discipline Audit Trails (DATs) and/or Thematic Enquiries

# Randall Rating

- **The Preliminary Meeting:**
  - Generally confined to Quality Unit and a few selected staff
  - Aftershocks may be significant, depending on the Institution's level of preparation



# Documentation

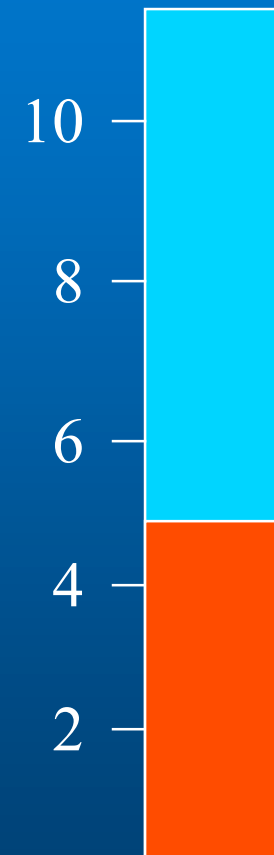


# The Audit Process - 2

- **Submission of Documentation**
  - **A Self-Evaluation Document (SED) and supporting documents must be submitted at least 18 weeks before the Visit**
  - **Student representatives can make their own Student Written Submission (SWS)**
  - **DAT Self-Evaluation Documents must be submitted at least 7 weeks before the Visit**

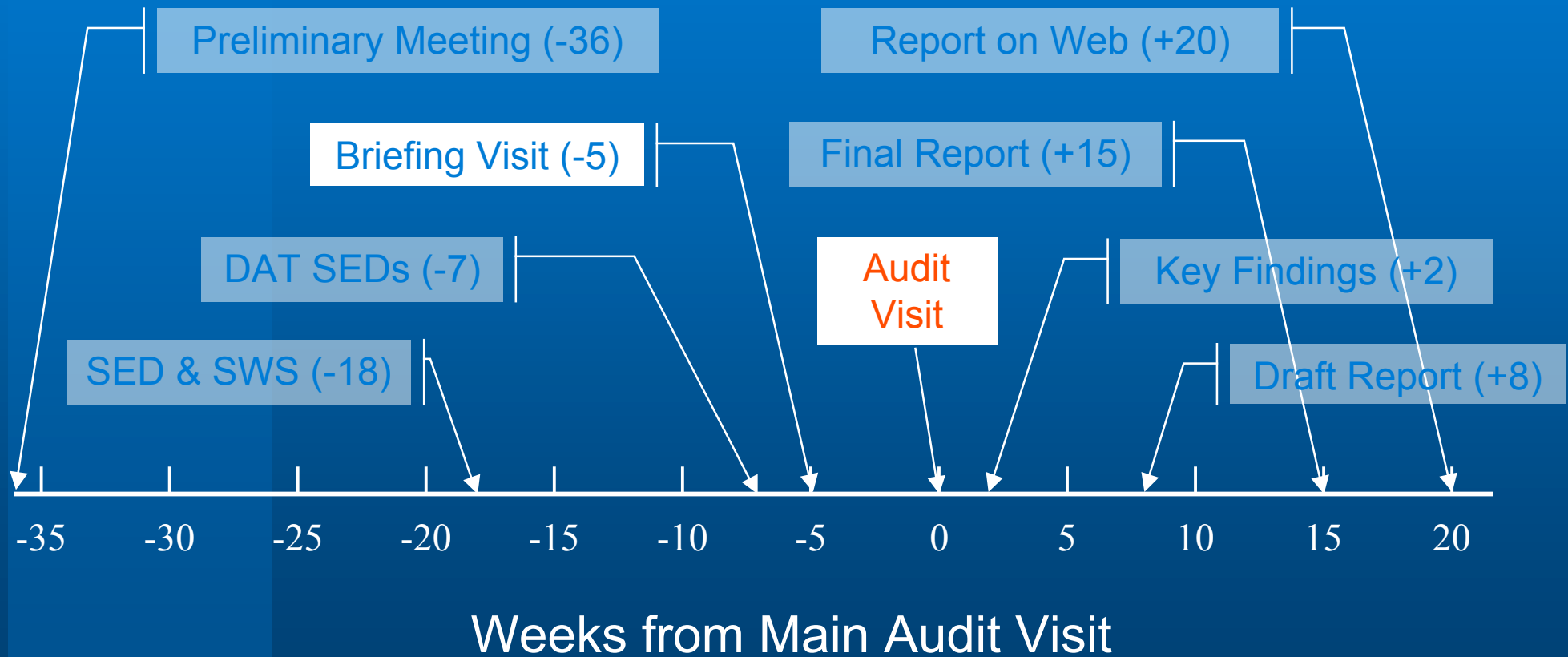
# Randall Rating

- **Submission of Documentation:**
  - Institutional SED prepared by Quality Unit and senior management
  - All sections of the institution should have ownership of the SED (including students)
  - DAT SED can be based on internal periodic review





# The Briefing Visit



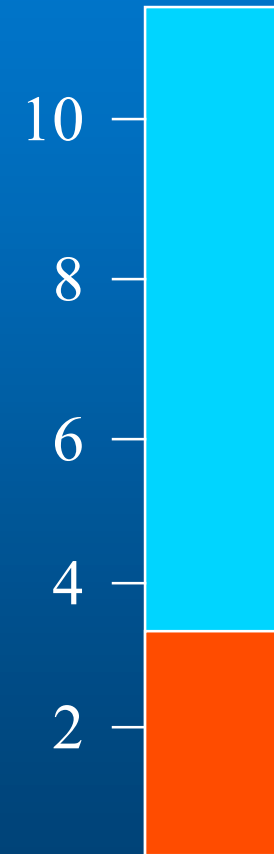
# The Audit Process - 3

- **The Briefing Visit**

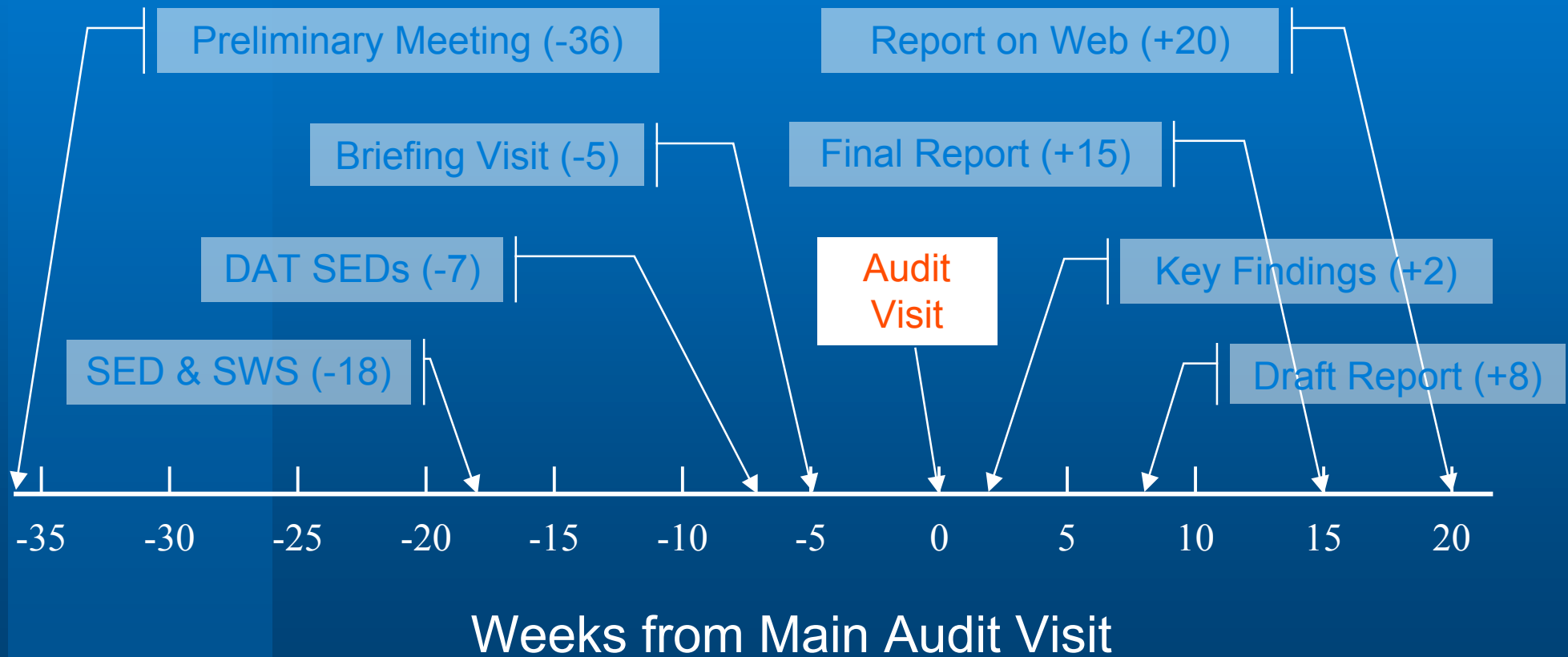
- Takes place 5 weeks before the Audit Visit and occupies three days (two at Institution)
- Audit team meets for the first time: aim is to clarify any outstanding issues and prepare the programme for the main audit visit
- Meetings are held with the Vice-Chancellor, senior managers and students

# Randall Rating

- **The Briefing Visit:**
  - Relatively small numbers of staff and students involved; remainder of Institution probably unaware that visit is taking place
  - May be demanding on members of Quality Unit and senior managers associated with teaching & learning



# The Audit Visit



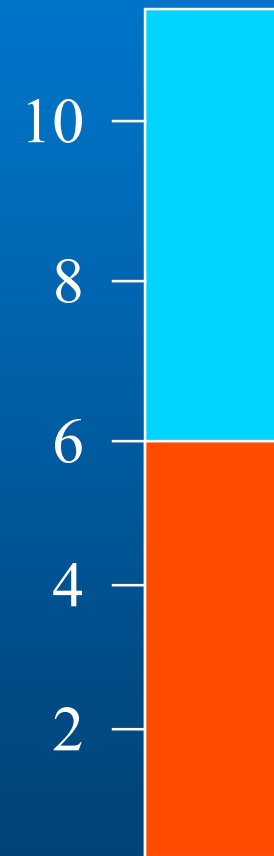
# The Audit Process - 4

- **The Audit Visit**

- Extends over a period of 5 or 6 days
- One day is typically reserved for DATs; each DAT involves 2 one-hour meetings, one with staff and the other with students
- Remaining time is spent in a series of meetings with selected groups of staff and students, and in scrutinising documents

# Randall Rating

- **The Audit Visit:**
  - **Some parts of the Institution will be engaged in intense activity**
  - **Generally, only departments that are subject to DATs will be under much scrutiny ...**
  - **... but auditors can choose to open up any line of inquiry**



# Report and Judgements

- **Key findings communicated by letter within two weeks of the Audit Visit**
- **Draft report normally submitted within eight weeks of the Audit Visit**
- **Audit teams make judgements on:**
  - **Level of confidence in quality management**
  - **Level of confidence in standards of awards**
  - **Level of reliance on published information**

# Reflections and Conclusions - 1

- **It is essential that the institution has made appropriate use of the Academic Infrastructure published by the QAA:**
  - **Code of Practice on Teaching and Learning**
  - **Framework for Higher Education Qualifications**
  - **Benchmark Statements**



# Reflections and Conclusions - 2

- **Institutions must be able to demonstrate that they have in place robust mechanisms for:**
  - Validation & approval of new programmes
  - Annual monitoring of programmes
  - Periodic review of programmes
- **External inputs to these processes are regarded as extremely important**

# Reflections and Conclusions - 3

- **Institutions must be able to show that they respond appropriately to external advice:**
  - **External inputs from programme validation and review events**
  - **External Examiners' comments**
  - **Outcome of PSRB Accreditation events**

# Reflections and Conclusions - 4

- **Institutions must be able to show that they listen to the student voice:**
  - Is there appropriate student representation on key teaching and learning committees?
  - How is feedback from students handled?
- **The student experience is a primary focus for Institutional Audit**

# Reflections and Conclusions - 5

- **How reliable is publicly available information about the Institution and its programmes?**
  - Programme specifications – do they make proper use of benchmark statements? Who are they intended for?
  - How accurate is information relating to student progression, graduation and employment statistics etc.?

# Reflections and Conclusions - 6

- **How effective is communication between the 'Centre' and faculties, schools or departments?**
  - Are departments fully signed up to quality management procedures laid down by the Institution?
  - Does the Institution respond appropriately to feedback it receives from departments?

# Reflections and Conclusions - 7

- **Is the University fully in control of any collaborative provision that it has?**
  - **Are the contractual arrangements sound?**
  - **Is the collaborative provision subject to the University's standard validation and review procedures?**