



The UK Quality Code Review: Summary of Feedback (November 2023 - January 2024)

Introduction

Since Autumn 2022, QAA has engaged with the sector about the future scope and structure of the UK Quality Code to ensure it continues to be valuable to evaluation and enhancement. To this end, QAA hosted seven online events in Autumn 2023 and published a survey, running from December 2023 to January 2024, to gather the sector's views on the latest version of the proposed Quality Code.

These activities generated feedback from more than 250 people representing a wide variety of providers from across the UK. The major themes emerging from this feedback are summarised briefly in this document; the detailed responses from the events and survey will form the basis for the next version of the Quality Code which will be made available for consultation in April 2024.

Sector-Agreed Principles

Respondents offered generally positive feedback regarding the Sector-Agreed Principles (SAPs). They were seen as clearly reflecting what is important in UK higher education and high level enough to suit the operational needs of different providers.

'The principles are clear, cover key areas of provision, quality, standards and enhancement and provide a useful framework.'

Suggested amendments included a greater emphasis on the role and contribution of external experts, such as external examiners, to quality assurance and enhancement, and clarification of Principle 11's reference to flexible modes of delivery to ensure that students do not interpret this as a requirement to offer hybrid delivery universally.

Commentary also suggested that some of the Principles could be expressed slightly differently to simplify them and improve clarity.

Principle 11

As expected, given this was a new Principle introduced in response to previous feedback, Principle 11 requires more significant amendments. General commentary was positive, however, and it was felt the proposed Principle is representative of the quality considerations to be made when focusing on teaching, learning and assessment.

One comment was that while integrity was highlighted in the Principle, it was insufficiently reflected in the Key Practices; there was a similar comment in relation to assessment. In addition, it was felt that the wording of the Principle was overly complex.

'... the enhancement focus of Principle 11 could be stronger. [For example, it could] highlight the importance of collecting and disseminating good practice.'

Key Practices

Feedback was positive about the Key Practices (KPs), which were seen as providing a clear framework and a welcome emphasis on enhancement. There were some comments in favour of a more comprehensive explanation of 'baselines', with some feedback highlighting that more needed to be included about research degrees, risk management, and data in the practices.

The purpose of the Practices appeared to be well understood, in that they offered the key considerations in meeting the overarching Principle, and participants welcomed the role of the soon to be redesigned Advice and Guidance in operationalising the Principles in practice.

'We believe the KPs should stay within the boundaries of reflection and consideration and not get too involved in implementation.'

Students as partners

Some indicated a desire for more specificity about what it means to work with students as partners. Whereas others expressed a need to be realistic about inherent tensions in this level of engagement.

'Some students may wish for and argue for what is easy and comfortable, not necessarily what is rigorous and of high standard.'

Tertiary

There was a request for the term 'tertiary' to be clarified and to be referred to more widely in the Quality Code (beyond the glossary) given the implementation of tertiary frameworks in some devolved nations.

It was noted there are difficulties with including a 'scope' section into the document given the diverging regulatory frameworks across the UK. However, the usefulness of this section was widely recognised. It was acknowledged that the Quality Code can, and should, apply across the breadth of higher education and into levels it has previously not been applicable to, but to do so, some terminology would need to be adjusted.

'Need to have more information including a clear definition of exactly what is meant by tertiary that is widely accepted and understood.'

Research

Some respondents asked for a greater emphasis on research, both in terms of research degrees and stressing how it informs teaching, learning and assessment. The ethos behind the Quality Code is that it applies to all levels and modes of study, however discussions at the events highlighted that perhaps research could be addressed in Key Practices (for example, those under Principle 11) and in the Advice and Guidance.

'Research [could] be added so that the key becomes how it informs teaching, learning and assessment.'

'Looking at the current Code, external expertise, research degrees and work-based learning are Advice and Guidance themes but they do not have a Principle in the proposal. It is not that they require their own Principle as such, but they need to be included within the Code as a whole.'

Enhancement

There were mixed views on whether enhancement was articulated sufficiently in the proposed Quality Code. There was support for making it stronger and more prominent, and for it to be specifically included in the glossary. A similar call was made for defining 'quality' in the glossary.

'... as a provider in England regulated by OfS, the distinction between quality assurance [and] enhancement needs to be clearer throughout the Code, and in the glossary.'

Flexible modes of delivery

There were calls for clarification over what was meant by 'flexible modes of delivery', with some thinking it could be interpreted as a requirement for students to be offered the choice between attending teaching and learning sessions in person or online.

'Institutions may not have the technology or human resources to support this level of in-course flexibility, but do offer different modes of delivery via their course provision, for example, full-time, part-time, online, short courses.'

Advice and Guidance

Respondents recognised that the practical help in meeting the Principles and Key Practices would be provided in the revised Advice and Guidance and saw this as key to operationalising the core element of the Quality Code. Aligning the Advice and Guidance directly to the top level of the Code was widely welcomed.

'Once Advice and Guidance with reflective questions is completed, this will enable an appropriate framework enabling both compliance and enhancement activity.'

Next steps

The UK Quality Code is a sector-led document and as such our approach throughout the development of the new version has been highly consultative. In light of the rich responses we have received from the last round of feedback, we are now developing a final draft which will be published for **formal consultation in April 2024**.

Implementation arrangements and timescales for when and how the 2024 version will replace the 2018 version will be set by the different UK nations and review methods. We will refer to these implementation schedules in the consultation document.

The consultation will be supplemented by two online events to inform participants about the document and the consultation questions. Later in the summer, we will publish the schedule for updating the suite of underpinning Advice and Guidance. We will also have an open call for participants for the expert writing groups who will work with us to revise, redevelop or create the Quality Code's new Advice and Guidance.

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