



Higher Education Toolkit - Alternative Providers:

**Engaging with the UK Quality Code for
Higher Education**

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About the toolkit

This is a PDF guidance document for Alternative Providers, particularly those without degree awarding powers that are undergoing a Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers). It is based on the [College Higher Education Toolkit](#) (PDF, 609KB), which was developed in consultation with further education and sixth form colleges to help staff understand and effectively use the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code). Therefore, sections of the toolkit that highlight actions that providers take are based on the work previously conducted with further education and sixth form colleges. Consideration of the outcomes from HER (AP) supports the applicability of this content for alternative providers. It is designed to help staff align internal quality assurance processes with the Quality Code to support effective quality management.

As providers continue to expand their portfolio in terms of the type and amount of higher-level qualifications they provide, aspects of quality assurance can become more complex. Quality systems need to be adaptable to the diversity of size and structure, along with the often complex relationships of multiple awarding bodies, franchises and range of qualifications offered. By identifying how the Quality Code can be applied and integrated, the toolkit is intended to be useful for providers in reviewing and enhancing their own practices.

Historically it has been recognised that for an organisation to develop effectively, quality must be considered across all areas. It is every bit as important for administrators and finance departments as for programme teams. The diverse range of providers in terms of size and scope may mean that organisational structures are quite different; however, the principle of engagement with quality remains the same.

All providers of UK higher education must meet the applicable Expectations of the Quality Code (the 19 Expectations are set out in full in the Annex). Providers can use the Expectations as part of the internal review of all areas of higher education provision, and the outcomes of such reviews are expected to be evidenced appropriately. The toolkit aims to support the beneficial sharing of information about how these Expectations have been addressed by different providers.

The toolkit is designed to be used as:

- a training tool to enhance own practice
- a reference while completing specific tasks
- an opportunity to consider autonomy within the context of your role
- a platform to share sound practice with links to supporting research.

Key features of the content

Throughout the toolkit, we highlight which Chapter or Part of the Quality Code should be consulted in relation to that particular paragraph or section. There are a number of 'Have you considered?' sections, suggesting areas to consider in relation to the topic discussed in that section or subsection.

Hyperlinks have been included where appropriate. References in the text refer to the additional resources and further references included, where relevant, in each section. However, due to the dynamic nature of research in higher education provision it is advisable to search independently for recent publications. The toolkit is complemented by a number of other resources available on QAA's website and other relevant sites.

Case studies and features of good practice are highlighted to widen awareness of current practices and what can be learned from them. Owing to the diversity of the UK higher education sector, the examples included should be seen as developmental not prescriptive.

About the Quality Code

The UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code)¹ sets out 19 Expectations that all providers of UK higher education reviewed by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) are required to meet. It is owned, maintained and published by QAA and has been developed with the higher education community.

Ongoing consultation enables QAA to ensure that the Quality Code continuously represents Expectations on which the higher education sector has agreed.

Its purpose in relation to UK higher education is:

- to safeguard academic standards
- to assure the quality of learning opportunities offered to students
- to promote continuous and systematic improvement
- to ensure that relevant information is publicly available.

The Quality Code applies to all UK higher education, whether provided within the four nations of the UK or delivered internationally. It applies to providers with the power to award their own degrees and to those who deliver higher education on behalf of another degree-awarding body/organisation or are otherwise reviewed by QAA. It protects the interests of all UK higher education students regardless of where they are studying or whether they are full-time, part-time, undergraduate or postgraduate students.

Individual higher education providers use the Quality Code to ensure students have a high quality educational experience.

Structure

The Quality Code consists of a General Introduction and a series of separate Chapters grouped in three Parts. The three parts are interrelated and are mirrored in the themes of the external reviews carried out by QAA.

Part A addresses the setting and maintenance of academic standards. Chapters in Part B set out in detail the processes through which all higher education providers engage in order to set, deliver and maintain academic standards and enhance the quality of learning opportunities. Part C is concerned with the quality of information produced by higher education providers in terms of whether it is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards

This Part comprises three Chapters:

- *Chapter A1: UK and European Reference Points for Academic Standards*
- *Chapter A2: Degree-Awarding Bodies' Reference Points for Academic Standards*
- *Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards*

Within these Chapters there are seven Expectations, which can be found in the Annex.

Chapter A1 formally incorporates, and places in an explanatory context, the following QAA publications as constituent components of this Part of the Quality Code:

¹ The UK Quality Code for Higher Education can be found at: www.qaa.ac.uk/qualitycode.

- **the Qualifications Frameworks** (the UK national frameworks for higher education qualifications): The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ) and The Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland (FQHEIS), which set out the different qualification levels and national expectations of standards of achievement
- **the credit framework for England:** the Higher Education Credit Framework for England: Guidance on Academic Credit Arrangements in Higher Education in England
- **the Subject Benchmark Statements** which set out the nature and characteristics of degrees (generally bachelor's with honours) and the outcomes graduates are expected to achieve in specific subject areas
- guidance on qualification characteristics
- **the Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark.**

Part B: Assuring and Enhancing Academic Quality

This Part is divided into 11 Chapters, as follows.

- *Chapter B1: Programme Design, Development and Approval*
- *Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education*
- *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*
- *Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement*
- *Chapter B5: Student Engagement*
- *Chapter B6: Assessment of Students and the Recognition of Prior Learning*
- *Chapter B7: External Examining*
- *Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review*
- *Chapter B9: Academic Appeals and Student Complaints*
- *Chapter B10: Managing Higher Education Provision with Others*
- *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*

Part B follows the student journey. It is concerned with how well the learning opportunities made available to students enable them to achieve their award. *Chapters B1 to B9* apply to all providers; *Chapters B10 and B11* apply in particular circumstances. Each Chapter contains a single Expectation, all of which can be found in the Annex.

Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

Public confidence in higher education relies on public understanding of the achievement represented by higher education qualifications. This Part of the Quality Code sets out an Expectation that higher education providers make available valid, reliable, useful and accessible information about their provision.

Key features

Chapter introductions

Introductory sections define the context, and set out the rationale, for the Expectations. Their text can be used as an aid to interpreting and fulfilling the Expectations.

Expectations

Each Chapter of the Quality Code contains at least one mandatory Expectation. The Expectation expresses the key principle that the higher education community has identified as essential for the assurance of academic standards and quality.

Expectations make clear what UK higher education providers are required to do, what they expect of themselves and each other, and what students and the general public can therefore expect of them.

Individual providers are required to demonstrate they are meeting the Expectations effectively, through their own management and organisational processes, taking account of organisational needs, traditions, culture and decision making. The Expectations are the mandatory element of the Quality Code against which individual providers are judged through external reviews carried out by QAA.

Indicators of sound practice

The Expectation in each Chapter is accompanied by a series of Indicators that reflect sound practice, and through which providers may demonstrate that they are meeting the relevant Expectation. They are broad statements of principle and are not mandatory or prescriptive, but exemplify the sorts of actions that a provider might take, thereby demonstrating that they meet the Expectation. Only parts B and C contain Indicators.

Explanatory notes

Indicators of sound practice are supported by explanatory notes that give more detail, together with examples of how the Indicator may be interpreted in practice. The application of any examples given will depend on the circumstances of a particular provider.

The explanatory notes also provide signposts to other resources including relevant legal and regulatory requirements (these are factual and therefore updated as accuracy of that information requires), which contain further information about how the Expectations may be met. They link together various sources of useful information without duplicating work already done, including extensive referencing to work undertaken by other bodies such as the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and the National Union of Students (NUS).

Overarching values

The overarching values of the Quality Code describe the characteristics that UK higher education providers are expected to demonstrate.

- Every student is treated fairly and with dignity, courtesy and respect.
- Every student has the opportunity to contribute to the shaping of their learning experience.
- Every student is properly and actively informed at appropriate times of matters relevant to their programmes of study.
- All policies and processes relating to study and programmes are clear

- and transparent.
- Strategic oversight of academic standards and academic quality is at the highest level of academic governance of the provider.
- All policies and processes are regularly and effectively monitored, reviewed and improved.
- Sufficient and appropriate external involvement exists for the maintenance of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities.
- All staff are supported, enabling them in turn to support students' learning experiences.

Overarching themes

Each Part and Chapter of the Quality Code considers and addresses the following overarching themes, as appropriate to the topic in the Chapter.

- How is information about the topic communicated to students and other relevant audiences?
- How can the employability of students be addressed in relation to the topic?
- How are equality and diversity issues embedded throughout?
- How does the topic consider the needs of a diverse student body?
- How do the responsibilities of degree-awarding bodies and other higher education providers differ in relation to the topic?
- How might matters relating to the topic differ in the four nations of the UK?
- How does the content of the Chapter align with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*² and other European and international higher education reference points, as appropriate?
- How do good practice and enhancement relate to the topic, including reference to relevant publications such as Enhancement Themes and Outcomes papers, and work by the Higher Education Academy?

What does the Quality Code do?

The Quality Code gives all higher education providers, including alternative providers delivering higher education programmes, a shared starting point for setting, describing and maintaining the academic standards of their higher education programmes and qualifications and for assuring the quality of the learning opportunities they provide for students. This makes it possible to ensure that higher education provision and outcomes are comparable and consistent at a threshold level across the UK.

In discharging their responsibilities for setting and maintaining the academic standards of their programmes and the quality of the learning opportunities they offer to students, all higher education providers are required to meet the Expectations of the Quality Code.

Higher education providers use the Quality Code as a tool to help them maintain the academic standards of programmes and awards, assure and enhance the quality of learning opportunities and to provide information about their higher education provision. They use it to design their policies and procedures for maintaining academic standards and quality and to bolster their quality assurance mechanisms, from programme design and approval through to monitoring and review.

The Expectations of the Quality Code apply where a student is following a programme of study which ultimately leads to a qualification or the award of academic credit at levels 4-8 of

² Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area: www.enqa.eu/index.php/home/esg.

the FHEQ or levels 7-12 of the FQHEIS.

This includes integrated foundation year programmes which are designed to enable entry to a specified degree programme or programmes on successful completion. In these cases, it may be necessary to use other external reference points in addition to the Quality Code to set academic standards for the foundation element. If the foundation provision is free-standing, and does not have a direct relationship with a specified higher education programme, it is not covered by the Quality Code, but may be subject to other regulatory requirements.

While providers differ considerably, all must meet the Expectations of the Quality Code. The review method Higher Education Review: Alternative Providers has the flexibility to adapt to differences between providers while at the same time enabling it to check that providers fully meet their responsibilities for standards and quality as set out in the Quality Code. HER (AP) therefore offers higher education providers the opportunity to demonstrate how they are meeting nationally agreed Expectations. With representation of students on review teams, comprised of three or more reviewers, and their engagement in the quality assurance process, the HER (AP) method supports continuous improvement on quality and standards as part of everyday provider life.

Who is the Quality Code for?

Specialist staff with responsibility for academic standards and quality

The Quality Code provides technical guidance for staff with responsibility for the setting and maintenance of academic standards, quality assurance, and quality enhancement. It is designed as a specialist tool (reference point) for those managing higher education provision. Its contents will often inform individual providers' policies and processes.

The wider community of higher education staff

While in the wider higher education community staff do not necessarily need to be aware of the detail of the whole Quality Code, it is expected that they are familiar with the policies that it informs and any parts of the Quality Code that are relevant to their own responsibilities. It is also expected that academic and professional staff would make use of the Quality Code when carrying out particular activities, such as designing new programmes or determining the nature of support for student learning. Most relevant are *Chapters B1: Programme Design, Development and Approval* and *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*.

Student representatives

Student representatives, including officers of student representative bodies (such as a students' union), will find the Quality Code useful in their discussions with their higher education provider, as it sets out the expectations for the quality of learning opportunities that the provider makes available to its students.

Students and the wider public

The Quality Code provides an important basis for comparability and consistency in provision and outcomes at a threshold level across the UK higher education sector. In this way it provides safeguards for students, the whole UK higher education sector and the general public.

QAA reviewers

Reviewers carrying out the QAA-coordinated external reviews of higher education providers use the Quality Code as a reference point for judging whether an individual provider is meeting the nationally agreed Expectations.

How do we define standards and quality?

Threshold academic standards are the minimum acceptable level of achievement that a student has to demonstrate to be eligible for the award of academic credit or a qualification. For equivalent qualifications, the threshold level of achievement is agreed across the UK and is described by the qualification descriptors set out in the Qualifications Frameworks.³

Academic standards are the standards that individual degree-awarding bodies set and maintain for the award of their academic credit or qualifications. These may exceed the threshold academic standards. They include the standards of performance that a student needs to demonstrate to achieve a particular classification of a qualification, such as a first-class honours degree classification in a certain subject or the award of merit or distinction in a master's degree.

Academic quality is concerned with how, and how well, the higher education provider supports students to enable them to achieve their award. It covers learning, teaching and assessment, and all the different resources and processes a provider puts in place to help students progress and fulfil their potential.

Quality assurance is the process for checking that the academic standards and quality of higher education provision meet agreed expectations.

Additional resources and further references

The UK Quality Code for Higher Education: www.qaa.ac.uk/qualitycode

What is the UK Quality Code for Higher Education:
www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/films/film?PubID=206

³ *The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies*, available at: www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/qualifications-frameworks.pdf (PDF, 241KB).

Governance and management

Providers publish information that describes their mission, values and overall strategy. A provider may use a higher education strategy document to set out a clear rationale for its higher education provision. It would detail how it manages its relationships with its partners and other higher education providers; how it builds on the strengths of any other further education (FE) provision; and how it addresses higher education related staff development activity, management and resourcing, curriculum development and relationships with employers.

Necessary structures

Are there specific structures necessary to run higher education in alternative providers?

Providers usually determine their approach to the shape and structure of their higher education provision according to, among other factors, the size and the proportion of provision at a higher level, historical background, tradition, strategic aims and objectives. These factors influence the extent to which higher education is separated from any other further education provision or integrated within it.

Providers may have some higher education strategies separate from those for any other further education provision. Where this is not the case, it is important to ensure that current policies address the specific needs of higher education students. Depending on their size and the range of programmes offered, some providers may also make efforts to provide distinctive accommodation for teaching, and social spaces dedicated to their higher education students.

What does the Quality Code say about this? How does it help in developing efficient structures while avoiding duplication for providers offering both further and higher education?

The Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision stresses that information produced by higher education providers should be clear, timely, current and transparent, and that it should focus on the needs of the intended audience. It should also be available and retrievable where intended users can reasonably expect to find it. Therefore, providers should consider where policies (for example, in relation to admissions, complaints/appeals and assessment) are located so as to be accessible to prospective and current higher education students as applicable. Separate policies and procedures for further and higher education students are not necessarily required, but the documents should distinguish between these separate groups and address the specific needs of higher education students.

Necessary management information

Does the Quality Code help in identifying management information that needs to be collected for purposes of quality assurance and enhancement?

To systematically review and enhance the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices, providers often collect and analyse information including:

- feedback from students on their learning experience, collected through internal mechanisms
- feedback from students through external instruments like the National Student

- Survey (NSS)
- routine evaluations of modules and programmes incorporating feedback from staff and external examiners
- feedback from alumni and employers, and placement providers' retention statistics
- mark profiles for students, modules and programmes
- availability and quality of teaching and learning spaces for formal and informal learning, and usage of any virtual learning environment (VLE) and assistive technology
- student academic appeals and complaints
- feedback from external reviews and accreditations, such as those of PSRBs.

The Quality Code makes frequent reference to the collection and analysis of management information that can be used for quality assurance and enhancement.

Use of admissions data

When considering recruitment, selection and admissions policies and procedures providers regularly review their materials and processes to ensure they remain fit for purpose; that they do not unduly discriminate against any potential applicant groups; and that any supporting information, advice and guidance required to complete a suitable application is reasonably accessible. To facilitate this, data is collected and analysed wherever possible. Analysis of data and statistics on applications, offers and acceptances, as well as on retention and achievement rates, withdrawal and transfer, and reasons for non-completion, can be accompanied by reflection on how internal and external developments have impacted upon admissions processes and on feedback received from staff throughout the admissions cycle.

Student engagement and feedback

Data including feedback from students and other stakeholders such as employers, academic and professional services staff and external organisations (including PSRBs where relevant) are used to inform how provision to enable student development and achievement is enhanced. Providers also consider how such data illustrate the effectiveness of their provision for different cohorts within a diverse student body, such as those cohorts with protected characteristics (such as age, disability and race). Providers gather feedback from current and former students to inform the professional development they offer to staff with responsibilities for various stages and aspects of the student experience including recruitment and admissions, administration and specialist professional services.

Providers have in place processes that enable systematic monitoring and evaluation of how well they engage students in quality assurance and enhancement. Collecting relevant management information enables them to demonstrate where student engagement has led to the enhancement of the educational experience.

Progression arrangements

Providers (with their degree-awarding bodies/awarding organisations where applicable) evaluate their assessment policies, regulations and processes to ensure that they remain equitable, valid and reliable. Management information enables student achievement and academic standards to be monitored over time. This monitoring may encompass the relationship between student entry qualifications and assessment outcomes and may involve considering feedback from sources such as external surveys on student perceptions.

To help prospective students make informed choices about where, what, when and how they will study, providers give students indicative information about how well a programme is performing. This may include information about graduate destinations, including employment

and further study, and about how satisfied students are with the programme.

Use of external examining

External examining is an integral and essential part of quality assurance, and providers draw on feedback from external examiners. An overview report may be produced for consideration by the relevant quality assurance committee(s) and at senior management level (the actual arrangements and processes for this will depend on factors such as the size of the provider). Themes and recurring recommendations can be identified and decisions made about consequent actions to enhance provision.

Internal monitoring and review

The processes of monitoring and programme review evaluate the standards of student attainment. These processes provide opportunities to collect and respond to feedback from students and other stakeholders such as employers. Monitoring and review may draw on information from many different areas, including academic staff teams/departments and professional services.

Providers draw upon qualitative and quantitative information in programme monitoring and review. This may include data on student progression and achievement, information made publicly available or reported to external bodies (including PSRBs), reports from external examiners, and other comparative data. Feedback from students, alumni, staff and employers also informs the processes. Where possible, data are disaggregated by protected characteristic in order to identify any differential impact on particular groups of students. Analysis of the data enables providers to identify areas for development as well as highlighting good practice.

Complaints and appeals procedures

Oversight of the implementation of appeals and complaints procedures is maintained by an appropriate senior body which receives reports of numbers, types and outcomes of appeals and complaints. Such reports may also include other relevant factors, for example: the level and mode of study of those making appeals and complaints; whether they are international or UK students; or whether they are studying through arrangements with other providers or organisations.

Academic standards

Academic standards are the standards that individual degree-awarding bodies and organisations set and maintain for the award of their academic credit or qualifications. Threshold academic standards are the minimum standards required for the award of qualifications at a particular level of the FHEQ or FQHEIS. They are distinct from the standards of performance that a student needs to demonstrate to achieve a particular classification of a qualification (these are set by individual degree-awarding bodies or awarding organisations).

Degree-awarding bodies are responsible for ensuring that threshold standards are met in their awards by aligning programme learning outcomes with the relevant qualification descriptors in the Qualifications Frameworks. They are also responsible for defining their own academic standards by setting the pass marks and determining classification criteria to differentiate between levels of student achievement above the threshold standard.

The primary focus of Part A is on how threshold academic standards are set and maintained.

Which parts of Part A apply to us as a provider without degree-awarding powers?

Degree-awarding bodies (typically universities) or awarding organisations are responsible for defining and recording, in a written agreement for each partnership arrangement, the specific functions delegated to a partner organisation (a higher education provider without degree awarding powers), and the individual and shared roles, responsibilities and obligations of each party. A degree-awarding body or awarding organisation's responsibility for the academic standards of all credit and qualifications awarded in its name is never delegated.

Providers that work with degree-awarding bodies or awarding organisations are responsible for delivering modules or programmes of study and maintaining the academic standards of the degree-awarding body or awarding organisation. The implementation of certain functions related to academic standards (for example, assessment) may be delegated to providers, which are then accountable to the degree-awarding body or awarding organisation for discharging them appropriately and for operating in accordance with the academic frameworks and regulations approved by that body/organisation. In some instances, the degree-awarding body or awarding organisation may have approved separate academic frameworks and/or regulations for an individual provider. In these circumstances, the provider may be responsible for contributing to the review of regulations and recommending changes for approval by the degree-awarding body or awarding organisation.

We are not a degree-awarding body. Do the Expectations of Part A not apply to us at all?

While Part A appears to be focused entirely on the roles and responsibilities of degree-awarding bodies, it also makes clear the roles that delivery organisations play in fulfilling their responsibilities as set out in their written agreement.

Responsibilities may have been delegated to them in relation to, for example, assessment, or around the development and review of degree-awarding bodies' academic frameworks and regulations. They may also have a role in the processes through which standards are set and maintained through programme design, development and approval, and therefore should be engaging appropriately with the Qualifications Frameworks (including qualifications descriptors and characteristics) and Subject Benchmark Statements; with designing assessment activities and/or carrying out moderation; and with managing the detection of plagiarism and the associated penalties.

How the Part A Expectations apply

Expectation A1

Application: Programmes must be aligned with the Qualifications Frameworks, credit frameworks and Subject Benchmark Statements.⁴

This responsibility for setting academic standards is not to be delegated by the degree-awarding body/awarding organisation. However, providers involved in curriculum design need to: work with the relevant national credit frameworks, positioning qualifications at the appropriate level; ensure that programme learning outcomes align with relevant qualification descriptors; name qualifications in accordance with titling conventions; ensure learning outcomes reflect the level of the award; and ensure that Subject Benchmark Statements and, if relevant, the *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark* inform programmes.

Where providers work with multiple awarding bodies/organisations, they adhere to the requirements of each.

Providers not involved in curriculum design demonstrate an awareness of how the programmes they deliver are aligned to the relevant frameworks and are informed by the qualification descriptors and Subject Benchmark Statements.

Expectation A2.1

Application: Academic governance arrangements take account of degree-awarding bodies'/awarding organisations' academic frameworks and regulations.

Providers articulate clearly the academic governance arrangements in place for the management of their higher education provision. Governance structures are supported by clear processes for managing the delegated responsibilities for academic standards set out in partnership agreements. Where providers have their own academic frameworks, regulations and processes in place, they align with those of their awarding bodies/organisations.

Where providers work with more than one degree-awarding body/organisation, they have a clear overview of academic and assessment regulations, and staff understand the different requirements of each awarding body/organisation.

Providers involved in curriculum design demonstrate how they have worked within the degree-awarding bodies' and/or other awarding organisations' academic frameworks in designing programmes. Providers not involved in curriculum design should demonstrate an awareness of the academic frameworks and regulations that govern the awards they deliver.

Providers adhere to the assessment processes laid down by their awarding bodies/organisations. Where they have delegated responsibilities - for example for setting and marking assessments and for internal moderation - processes and procedures are set out according to partnership agreements.

Providers review the effectiveness of arrangements through annual review and monitoring. They make use of external examiners' reports for confirmation that programmes are assessed fairly and consistently in line with awarding bodies'/organisations' regulations,

⁴ Subject Benchmark Statements, in Part A of the Quality Code:
www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/subject-benchmark-statements.

policies and procedures.

Expectation A2.2

Application: Providers keep a definitive record for each programme.

Individual degree-awarding bodies/awarding organisations are responsible for ensuring that there is an unambiguous understanding about the nature of any taught or research programme that they have formally approved for delivery through a partner organisation.

This is articulated in a definitive record which is then used as the reference point for the delivery of the programme by teaching staff/research supervisors, for its assessment by internal and external examiners, and in subsequent monitoring and review.

The definitive record is also used as the basis of the record of study and, in accordance with Indicator 4 of Part C, which enables information on the programme of study to be made available to students at the start of their programme and throughout their studies.

Providers produce documentation that includes definitive information on the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievements for each programme of study. This is made available to students through, for example, programme specifications and course handbooks available on the virtual learning environment (VLE). There should be a definitive record of each programme and qualification (including Higher Nationals), which is kept up to date.

Expectation A3.1

Application: Programme approval tests that standards are set at the appropriate level.

Providers that participate in programme design and approval should demonstrate a thorough understanding of the degree-awarding bodies'/awarding organisations' processes and how these are used to test that academic standards are set at the appropriate level. They should demonstrate how they have ensured that learning outcomes are aligned with the relevant descriptors. Providers have validation and re-validation processes and procedures (including for Higher National programmes).

The *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark* and Subject Benchmark Statements are used by providers when planning new programmes. Appropriate documentation shows how modules for each programme are mapped to the learning outcomes.

Providers that do not participate in programme approval demonstrate an awareness of how the degree-awarding body's/awarding organisation's approval processes test that academic standards are set at the appropriate level.

Feature of good practice

The extensive use of related subject benchmarks and externality, which informs programme development (Expectation A3.1).

Markfield Institute of Higher Education (MIHE)

MIHE has in place processes for programme approval that work appropriately and comply with the academic frameworks and regulations of its awarding bodies. MIHE's Institutional Governance and Quality Assurance Handbook contains details of validation and quality assurance processes. The Institute makes extensive use of external stakeholder input and appropriate use of Subject Benchmark Statements during programme design and approval. Where there is not a single relevant Subject Benchmark Statement for Islamic Studies, the

Institute develops its programmes with reference to a broad range of related benchmarks.

Expectation A3.2

Application: Assessment tests whether academic standards have been achieved.

Providers fulfil their delegated responsibilities for assessment in accordance with the degree-awarding body's/awarding organisation's academic regulations and assessment procedures. They have an assessment framework in place that enables the achievement of learning outcomes to be appropriately demonstrated.

Where providers have their own assessment regulations and internal verification processes these align with the procedures of their degree-awarding partners/awarding organisations. Regulations, policies and guidance for assessment are transparent, comprehensive, and clear to students and external examiners. They make suitable reference to reasonable adjustments where required for students with protected characteristics and provide helpful guidance on inclusive assessment strategies for staff.

Expectation A3.3

Application: Programme monitoring and review address whether academic standards are being maintained.

Providers fulfil their delegated responsibilities for programme monitoring and review in accordance with the degree-awarding body's/awarding organisation's academic regulations and procedures. Monitoring ensures that programmes are delivered in accordance with what was approved (using the definitive record of the programme as the reference point). Monitoring and review are used to ensure that academic currency is subsequently maintained and that programmes continue to meet the UK threshold standards and the degree-awarding bodies'/awarding organisations' own academic standards.

Providers have a clear framework for the monitoring and review of programmes that feeds into annual overview reports as part of a higher education quality cycle. Providers take responsibility for periodic reviews of their Higher National awards.

Expectation A3.4

Application: External and independent expertise is used at key stages of setting and maintaining academic standards.

Providers demonstrate an awareness of how independent external expertise is used to set academic standards, and fulfil their delegated responsibilities for ensuring external examiners are enabled to carry out their role effectively.

Providers use external academic and industry expertise in programme development, validation and review. For example, collaboration in the design and running of programmes together with provision of work placements are long-standing features of employer support for college-based higher education.

Providers and their degree-awarding bodies/awarding organisations make use of the external examiner system to demonstrate independent and external scrutiny of the maintenance of threshold academic standards. External examiners or external verifiers are appointed to each programme and confirm that the standards set at validation are appropriate and being maintained and are comparable with similar programmes of other higher education providers.

External examiners report explicitly on the setting and maintenance of UK threshold academic standards to assist providers in maintaining standards according to the requirements of their awarding bodies. External examiners' reports are used in annual monitoring, and in discussion at deliberative committee meetings as well as at programme-level meetings.

Have you considered?

- Which degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding bodies you are working with
- Which modules or programmes of study you are delivering for each of these
- Your understanding of the responsibilities you have been allocated by each awarding body/awarding organisation for helping to set and/or maintain the academic standards of their awards
- Your understanding of the responsibilities of the degree-awarding body and/or other awarding organisation in setting and maintaining academic standards
- Which internal and external reference points are relevant to setting and maintaining the academic standards of the provision you are delivering, and what use you make of these reference points
- The ways in which you are involved in recruitment, selection and admissions of students; in programme design, development and approval; in assessment of students; in engaging with external experts including external examiners; and in programme monitoring and review, and how these activities contribute to helping to set and maintain academic standards
- How you ensure that your staff understand and carry out their responsibilities for helping to set and/or maintain academic standards
- How you engage with the academic framework and regulations of each awarding body and/or other awarding organisation? And (if you are working with multiple bodies and/or if you have a regulatory framework of your own) how you manage differences in what is required
- The arrangements in place for you to report back to the awarding bodies/awarding organisation on how effectively you have carried out your responsibilities
- How well these arrangements are working at your end
- What gives you confidence in the academic standards of the provision you deliver

Quality of learning opportunities

Quality or academic quality is a way of describing how well the learning opportunities available to students help them to achieve their qualification. Quality is about making sure that appropriate and effective teaching, support, assessment and learning resources are provided for students.

Quality can be assured (checks are made that it meets UK expectations), and it can be enhanced (further improvements are made). Higher education providers demonstrate a commitment to providing a high quality learning experience. Input from students, who can make a direct contribution through providing feedback, advice and suggestions, is a key feature of quality enhancement and assurance processes. Robust information systematically generated by students, external examiners and others as part of routine quality assurance procedures can be considered at provider level as part of the oversight of higher education.

The quality and commitment of staff is critical to maintaining and enhancing the high quality of learning and teaching. Higher education providers recognise that all staff, both academic and support, continuously reflect upon, and seek to improve, their practice to advance learning and teaching and the quality of the student experience.

Higher education providers commit to reviewing activities systematically to see whether they can identify features of current practice that can be improved (see, Enhancement of learning opportunities). It does not mean that quality is not presently high, or that what is provided for students must be subject to constant change.

What are the relevant Expectations?

The relevant Expectations are those in the 11 Chapters of Part B of the Quality Code. These are set out in the Annex. Detailed notes on how to address them can be found in subsequent themed sections of this guidance:

- Creating a higher education ethos
- Student engagement
- Supporting higher education students
- Assessment
- Monitoring and review
- Higher Education Review

How does Part B relate to Part A?

Part A addresses the setting and maintenance of academic standards. Chapters in Part B set out in detail the processes in which all higher education providers engage, in order to set, deliver and maintain academic standards and enhance the quality of learning opportunities.

Information

Part C of the Quality Code⁵ sets out the following Expectation concerning information about higher education provision, which providers of higher education are required to meet:

Higher education providers produce information for their intended audiences about the learning opportunities they offer that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

This relates to:

- information for the public about the higher education provider
- information for prospective students - please also see 'information to help students make informed decisions' on page 47 of this document
- information for current students
- information for students on completion of their studies
- information for those with responsibility for academic standards and quality.

While the reference point for the information judgement in the Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) method is the Expectation in the Quality Code, it is important for providers to meet their obligations in terms of consumer protection law. Therefore, policies and procedures need to be in place to ensure consumer protection obligations are met.

Have you considered?

- How do you ensure that prospective students are given the information they need in order to make informed decisions?
- How do you ensure that the terms and conditions between you and your students are fair?
- How do you ensure your terms are easily located and accessible and that important terms are drawn to prospective students' attention before they accept an offer?
- How do you ensure that your terms are clear and unambiguous?
- How do you ensure that your terms are fair and balanced?
- How do you ensure that your complaint-handling processes and practices are accessible, clear and fair?

Documentation may therefore include:

- policies incorporating consumer protection obligations
- policies and procedures covering the provision of information to prospective students (before, with and after offers are made) and samples of such information
- policies for reviewing terms and conditions, including policies relating to course changes and closures and fee changes, examples of cases
- complaints processes and policies, and examples of cases
- academic and student regulations and supporting policies and/or any student contract, including in relation to terms allowing changes to courses and/or fees, and examples of how such terms have been applied
- complaints and appeals process and policies, and examples of cases.

Feature of good practice

The comprehensive and detailed information provided to staff and students exemplified by the Staff and Course Handbooks effectively underpinning the student learning

⁵ The Quality Code, Part C, available at: www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/quality-code-part-c.

experience (Information).

Edinburgh Theological Seminary

The website and the prospectus contain three sections for provision of information to applicants in relation to the Seminary, its life and culture, supported by an introductory video. Information for current students is provided mainly through programme handbooks, course handbooks, the 'MyETS' section on the website, and the VLE. A dedicated database contains information intended for graduates and alumni.

Teaching and administrative staff who are expected to be involved in maintaining academic standards and quality are also provided with a Staff Handbook, which includes information on mission and vision, governance and the relationship with the awarding body and a range of information in relation to learning, teaching, the Quality Code and the Seminary's learning resources.

A shared online information folder for staff gives access to Seminary policies including Assessment Policies, the Code of Student Conduct, Complaint and Appeals Procedures, the Memorandum of Agreement with the University, the Disability Policy, and information and regulations for all validated programmes.

Students confirmed that the information provided to prospective students and course-based information in handbooks is comprehensive, accurate and helpful. The Seminary also provides a handbook intended specifically for international students, and an induction handbook for newly appointed members of staff. The names of external examiners are included in programme and course handbooks.

The annual General Course Quality Questionnaire includes a question specifically on the usefulness of handbooks, and this has led to generally very positive outcomes in 2015-16. Students attending the revalidation meeting in 2012 also confirmed that the handbooks offered comprehensive information and advice.

Programme and course handbooks are reviewed by the Senate and Joint Board. Discussion also takes place with the Year Representative, which is recorded in the summary of outcomes of the General Course Quality Questionnaire and includes a commentary on course and programme handbooks. This process demonstrates the strengths of the Seminary's commitment to student engagement in the infrastructure which supports the learning environment.

Additional resources and further references

Competition and Markets Authority (2015):

[Higher education: consumer law advice for providers](#) (PDF, 663KB).

Information for Students. A guide to providing information to prospective undergraduate students. Developed by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education on behalf of: DfENI, HEFCE, HEFCW and SFC (2017): www.hefce.ac.uk/it/provinfo/

Enhancement of learning opportunities

Enhancement is defined as the process by which higher education providers systematically improve the quality of provision and the ways in which students' learning is supported (General Introduction).

This can take place in different ways and at different levels, but a higher education provider needs to be aware that it has a responsibility to improve the quality of learning opportunities and to have policies, structures and processes in place to detect where improvement is necessary. Willingness to consider enhancement is embedded throughout the higher education provider, but stems from a high-level awareness of the need to consider improvement. Quality enhancement naturally forms part of effective quality assurance, and consequently guidance on possible approaches to enhancement is embedded throughout the Quality Code. Specific definitions of enhancement exist for the purposes of QAA's review methods.

What definition of enhancement is used for review purposes?

Enhancement is defined by QAA for the purposes of review in England, Wales and Northern Ireland as: 'taking deliberate steps at provider level to improve the quality of learning opportunities' which appropriately summarises the Quality Code definition set out above.⁶

This definition suggests a particular approach which links strategy and initiative. Providers should be able to demonstrate a strategic approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities (through systematic planning at provider level) and an ethos that expects and encourages it, providing opportunities to identify, support and disseminate good practice. Thus, enhancement involves an integrated approach rather than being just a collection of examples of good practice.

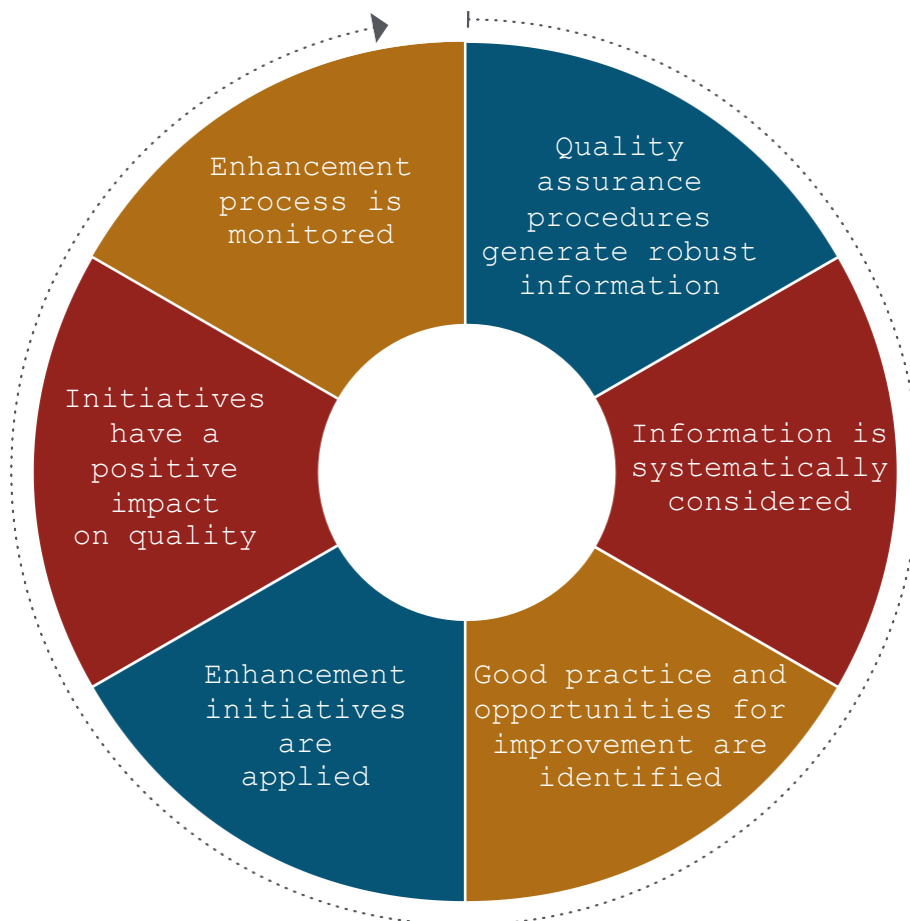
A strategic approach necessitates systems that enable relevant management information to be collected. This informs the provider's deliberative structures and strategic enhancement initiatives and work streams in relation to, for example, curriculum design, student retention, scholarly activity, learning and teaching, developing a higher education ethos, and the use of VLEs.

Effective communication channels inform staff of the enhancement priorities. Actions taken as a result of the initiatives can be measured, monitored and evaluated for effectiveness in terms of student satisfaction or improvements in the quality of learning opportunities and any resulting good practice shared.

Such an approach includes mechanisms for obtaining robust information from students, external examiners and other relevant parties. Gathering such information does not presuppose any deficit in quality; rather, the collection of useful feedback forms part of effective routine quality assurance procedures.

Feedback is systematically considered at management level as part of the oversight of higher education quality. Good practice and opportunities for further improvement are thus identified and inform new strategic initiatives that have a positive impact on the quality of learning opportunities.

⁶ Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) Handbook, available at: www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication/?PubID=3174.



These processes work most effectively when sound measures are in place to obtain feedback from students and other relevant parties.

In brief, the key features of effective quality enhancement are:

- effective strategic oversight of higher education at provider level to provide a framework for actions, consider information and inform new initiatives
- dynamic learning and teaching practice to incorporate enhancement initiatives
- comprehensive and accurate evaluation procedures
- systematic monitoring of the process to ensure continued fitness for purpose.

Where is enhancement in the Quality Code?

There is no separate Chapter on enhancement because it is addressed throughout the Quality Code. Particular reference is made to it in the following Chapters and Indicators.

Chapter B3, Indicator 5

Higher education providers collect and analyse appropriate information to ensure the continued effectiveness of their strategic approach to, and the enhancement of, learning opportunities and teaching practices.

Chapter B4, Indicator 1

Through strategic and operational planning, and quality assurance and enhancement, higher education providers determine and evaluate how they enable student development and achievement.

Chapter B5, Expectation

Higher education providers take deliberate steps to engage all students, individually and collectively, as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience.

Chapter B6, Indicator 18

Degree-awarding bodies systematically evaluate and enhance their assessment policies, regulations and processes.

Chapter B8, Indicator 2

Higher education providers take deliberate steps to use the outcomes of programme monitoring and review processes for enhancement purposes.

Chapter B9, Expectation B9

Higher education providers have procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints about the quality of learning opportunities; these procedures are fair, accessible and timely, and enable enhancement.

Part C, Indicator 7

Higher education providers set out their framework for managing academic standards and quality assurance and enhancement and describe the data and information used to support its implementation

What aspects of provision are covered, and where?

Enhancement is not confined to the above Expectations and Indicators, as providers are committed to putting in place processes and procedures that enable them to systematically evaluate and improve the quality of provision and the ways in which students' learning is supported. The following subsections provide examples (which are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive).

Programme design, development and approval

Programme design, development and approval depend on reflection and critical self-assessment. Programmes are continually evaluated and revised to improve the learning experience for students.

Recruitment, selection and admission

Providers regularly review their application materials and processes to ensure they remain fit for purpose, that they do not unduly discriminate against any potential applicant groups and that any supporting information, advice and guidance required to complete a suitable application is reasonably accessible and allows all students to make an informed decision. Providers who adhere to their awarding bodies'/awarding organisations' policies and procedures may have little or no involvement in their review or development. However, strong channels of communication should be in place that enable feedback on identified improvements to policies and the dissemination of changes or updates to a policy to all affected staff.

Learning and teaching

Providers recognise that effective learning and teaching activities and practices that result in inspirational teaching depend on staff who are appropriately qualified for their role and who engage throughout their career in continuing professional development (CPD), in the evaluation of their practice, and in developing their understanding of their subject and the learning processes as it relates to their subject. Opportunities for CPD are planned strategically, and providers have in place procedures that facilitate the identification and dissemination of good practice.

Enabling student development and achievement

Providers give thought to and develop an approach that enables every student to fulfil their potential and engage in learning. The thorough evaluation of the effectiveness of the strategies and operation of the provision forms a key part of a provider's quality assurance and enhancement cycle.

Student engagement

Effective learning and teaching occur when the partnership between the provider, their staff and their students results in the co-production and enhancement of creative and transformational learning. Students are uniquely positioned to comment on how a strategic approach to learning and teaching enables and supports their learning and how enhancement of the opportunities can benefit their learning. Consequently, student involvement in quality can have a positive influence on the delivery and development of any aspect of the student educational experience.

Assessment of students and the recognition of prior learning

As part of their strategic approach to enhancing the quality of their provision and their management of academic standards, degree-awarding bodies/awarding organisations, working with students and with delivery organisations where applicable, evaluate their arrangements and identify opportunities for development, making use of management information as appropriate.

External examining

External examiners offer advice on good practice and opportunities to enhance the quality of programmes/modules through annual written reports to a provider or its awarding body. Providers consider these reports carefully and take action in response to recommendations.

Programme monitoring and review

All higher education providers are involved in elements of programme monitoring and review processes because these enable providers to consider how the learning and teaching experience for students may be improved. Programme monitoring and programme review are part of a continuous engagement by staff and students with a programme and lead to enhancement, as providers reflect on their academic provision and consider how it may be changed to enhance the student learning experience. Good practice can be identified, built upon and shared, providing opportunities for continuous improvement of the programme and the student experience. Processes are designed in such a way as to enable a balance between assurance and enhancement to be achieved.

Academic appeals and complaints

The investigation of appeals and complaints provides an important source of feedback for providers which contributes to the enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities.

Managing higher education with others

An increasing variety of arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with others can enhance the student experience. These can include offering flexible entry routes and modes of study (such as part-time study while working) which may widen access; curricula that offer learning related to contemporary working practices; or new forms of teaching delivery.

Feature of good practice

The strong strategic approach to enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, which is embedded in organisational structures and processes (Enhancement).

London School of Business and Management Ltd

The new Quality and Enhancement Manual is gradually becoming the source of choice for quality assurance and enhancement information. There is a strong commitment to supporting a diverse constituency of learners from the outset. This has prompted initiatives such as the student survey; the SAS division's induction activities; the Centre for Academic Support and Enhancement's Student Development Module; the Personal Academic Tutor System; and the recently introduced Peer Assisted Learning Scheme. Equally, there is a major emphasis on investing in and developing academic staff through peer observation, Teaching and Learning Forums, achievement of Higher Education Academy accreditation, and providing training in assessment and VLE usage. Staff have access to development funding at individual staff member level, at divisional level and at corporate level. There is also a financial allocation to support team building activities.

Underpinning this strong institutional focus on enhancement is the School's Servant Leadership philosophy, a humanistic ethical position stressing service, trust, respect and the practice of leadership. This philosophy provides a unifying theme for the School's enhancement programme. Whether the focus is on staff or student development, as staff clarified, Servant Leadership is not regarded as a new development but as a restatement of established practice. For some staff it means an open-door policy and for others it is about initiating a culture of supporting others, for example, through Peer Assisted Learning. Staff seemed knowledgeable about the Servant Leadership concept, although students were less aware.

That enhancement activities have impacted on the learning experience was evidenced by examples from staff and students, for example surveying students about e-books to enable service enhancement; developing a UK Professional Standards Framework-linked School Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning to support staff in enhancing their teaching practice; responding to student issues, initially quickly and reactively, but also strategically through the Annual Planning Cycle.

Have you considered?

- How you collect information from students and other stakeholders to inform strategic improvements in the quality of students' learning experiences
- How you ensure that this information is fit for purpose
- How you analyse this information
- How you make sure that this analysis happens at an appropriate strategic level
- How this analysis leads to initiatives at provider level which further improve the

- quality of students' learning experiences
- How you measure the effectiveness of these initiatives
- How you monitor the enhancement procedure

Further questions

Here are some fundamental questions that are asked at programme level in the various processes of provider-led reviews.

Where are you are now? Who are your students? What are the characteristics and learning needs of your students? How effective is the current learning experience of your students? Are some groups of students more successful learners than others? Are some groups of students better prepared for post-graduation life than others? What evidence can you draw on? How robust is the evidence? What is the evidence telling you?

Where do you want to be in the future? What are the patterns and mechanisms of supporting learning which you, as a provider wishes to develop in order to support student engagement and high quality learning?

How will you get there? How will you strategically manage the enhancement processes that will allow you to meet your aspirations?

How will you know when you get there? What monitoring and evaluation processes do you have in place? How will the outcomes be analysed? How, and to whom, will the outcomes be disseminated?

Additional resources and further references

Application of the Enhancement Expectation:

www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/Application-of-enhancement.pdf (PDF, 32KB).

Case study - Enhancement
<p>London School of Business and Management Ltd</p> <p>Supporting professional development in teaching</p>
<p>Review finding (October 2015)</p> <p>The London School of Business and Management Ltd received a commendation for the enhancement of its student learning opportunities. QAA identified as a feature of good practice:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">'the strong strategic approach to enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, which is embedded in organisational structures and processes' (Quality Code, Chapter B3 and Enhancement).</p> <p>About the good practice</p> <p>The School provides extensive support for the continuing professional development (CPD) of its staff. All academic staff are supported to become Fellows or Senior Fellows of the Higher Education Academy (HEA). The confidential Peer Observation of Teaching Scheme and the Managed Observation of Teaching Scheme, both aligned with the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF), are key components of the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy. Good practice thus identified is shared through the Teaching and Learning Forum (TLF), and at the annual Teaching and</p>

Learning Conference.

HEA recognition and the use of the UKPSF to enhance teaching are central tenets of the School's academic strategy and key drivers of staff development. To convert strategy to practice the School has a number of measures in place:

- generous remission for research/scholarship, especially in areas of teaching and learning
- funding per academic staff member for CPD, alongside divisional (departmental) CPD budgets
- reward of good teaching and learning through a prize for the best virtual learning environment, and, from 2016, a 'best teacher' award from students.

All full-time staff now have HEA membership, and the UKPSF is applied to most areas of CPD. At the 'chalk face', the benefits for students are demonstrated by the positive feedback gained through module evaluation questionnaires and meetings of the staff-student forum. At institutional level, the active commitment to CPD is reflected in an extensive range of staff opportunities that include Research Seminars, an e-Learning Reading Group, the Teaching and Learning Conference, and over 30 in-house CPD events annually.

Evaluation and development

Good practice and areas for development identified in the observations are collated and discussed in the TLF. Good practice is also identified through course-specific annual monitoring and evaluation, summarised in an overview report to inform planning and budget setting. The School has invested in EvaSys software to conduct a range of sophisticated surveys on the quality of teaching and learning and inform further improvements.

Creating a higher education ethos

To create an ethos that differentiates between higher and further education, providers put in place facilities and structures, processes and procedures, including scholarly activity and staff development opportunities, that enable students to meet their academic aspirations through self-directed, independent learning.

What is the scope of scholarly activity?

The Quality Code notes that 'Scholarship and research lie at the heart of higher education' (*Chapter B3*, page 13). However, their nature depends on the academic level of the programme, the subject area and the provider.

Scholarly activity undertaken in some providers may not necessarily involve original research, or lead to the production of new knowledge or the publication of academic journals but it does mean more than professional development. Enhancing the research abilities of staff is likely to have a positive impact on their teaching and helps to develop a higher education ethos among staff and students.

While there is no agreed definition for scholarly activity in a college-based context, HEFCE (HEFCE, 2009/05 page 165) considers that it is about developing and informing practice through specific activities, such as those listed below, which may also be applicable to alternative providers:

- keeping up to date with the subject
- curriculum development, particularly in relation to foundation degrees, often working with degree-awarding bodies
- curriculum development that involves research
- updating information and communications technology (ICT) skills
- taking higher qualifications - master's degrees, doctorates and teaching qualifications
- consultancy to industry and other agencies
- industrial secondments or work shadowing
- involvement with Sector Skills Councils
- research and publications
- applied research
- personal development
- attending staff development events
- attending conferences and workshops externally.

This would involve reading the latest books, and academic and professional journals, but could also include writing, observations and review of other professionals, attendance at relevant conferences, attendance at workshops and seminars, professional networking and specific project work of an academic or specific professional nature. Scholarly activity in this context includes activity that supports deeper understanding and maintains the latest thinking of the academic community and keeping up to date with professional or vocational applications of the subject.

One important aspect of teachers' scholarly activity in a college-based higher education context is to ensure that their knowledge is current in order to meet the demands of more challenging students (Jones, 2006). Simmons and Lea (2013) point to scholarly activity as having benefits for students' learning opportunities, the quality of teaching and learning, academic standards, the currency of the curriculum, and the currency of staff subject knowledge.

Feature of good practice

The distinctive and shared staff and student research environment, which contributes to student learning opportunities (Expectation B3).

Sotheby's Institute of Art

A variety of staff development activities provides opportunities to inform approaches to higher education pedagogy. These include training days and a dedicated staff member to support staff training. The Institute shares best practice between the teaching teams through training events and retreat days, which staff confirm have a significant impact on their development. The Institute, despite its size, also supports staff research activity. This underpins student learning and the students value this highly. Academic staff can apply for research funding to the Research and Development Committee, and the Institute encourages staff engagement in projects and conferences. Staff actively engage with peer-reviewed articles and publications and often work with students on shared research areas, establishing some highly distinctive research groups. Outcomes of research activity are shared at faculty planning days. The Institute has already produced a series of scholarly publications with its publishing partner and has published two volumes of student dissertations. These demonstrate the students' capacity for highly distinctive analytical, critical and creative thinking.

Have you considered?

- Whether you, as a provider, are strategically committed to scholarly activity that enhances the student learning experience
- Whether within the higher education provision there is a culture of scholarly activity that clearly supports the enhancement of learning opportunities
- What forms of scholarly activity best support your context, for example a commitment to serve the local community
- Partnered approaches to scholarly activity with degree-awarding bodies
- How you maintain and develop staff subject currency
- How you promote scholarly activity among your higher education teaching staff
- How you support staff to undertake scholarly activity, for example through teaching remission
- How you approve scholarly activity applications
- How you record scholarly activity
- What forums are in place to facilitate the dissemination of the outputs of scholarly activity
- How you evaluate the impact of scholarly activity on the maintenance of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities

Additional resources and further references

Higher Education Funding Council for England (2009/05) *Supporting Higher Education in Further Education Colleges*. Policy, Practice and Prospects. Bristol: HEFCE.

Simmons, J and Lea, J (2013) *Capturing an HE Ethos in College Higher Education Practice*, QAA, Gloucester: www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2773

Parry, G, Callender, C, Scott, P and Temple, P (2012) *Understanding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges*, BIS Research Paper 69. London: BIS: www.gov.uk/government/publications/understanding-higher-education-in-further-education-colleges

How do staff continue their professional development?

Providers assure themselves that everyone involved in teaching or supporting student learning is appropriately qualified, supported and developed. This extends beyond staff involved in teaching on programmes delivered at the provider to third parties who deliver individual modules or support students to achieve learning outcomes when on placements or through work-based learning.

While many providers require staff to possess a qualification higher than the one they are delivering, it is for providers to determine what is necessary to demonstrate that a member of staff is qualified to fulfil their role in teaching or supporting learning. Many staff will hold or be working towards a relevant formal qualification; however, this is not always the case where staff bring with them industrial experience and expertise or where they have current practitioner knowledge and an understanding of the subject they teach.

Throughout their teaching careers staff are encouraged to engage with opportunities to develop and extend their teaching capabilities and to reflect upon their teaching practice. Providers offer appropriate induction and mentoring to staff who are new to teaching or to supporting higher education students.

Providers also encourage staff to undertake professional development activities that specifically address higher education learning and teaching.

Providers may encourage staff to take initial teaching qualifications and to add further value to their roles by engaging with the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and/or the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF), as well as being open to continuing professional development (CPD) generally. Providers thereby demonstrate the value they place upon enhancing the skills of all staff who support learning, and on the quality of the learning experiences offered to their students.

Identifying the CPD needs of higher education staff

In the interests of quality enhancement, providers support and monitor staff performance through line management, appraisal, monitoring, lesson and peer observation, and review of teaching. Peer observation and review of teaching identify strengths and areas for improvement which feed into the appraisal process, forming the basis of both an individual and a provider-wide professional development programme.

Feature of good practice

The strong, embedded approach to staff scholarship, which promotes active research and informs programme delivery (Expectation B3).

Bristol Baptist College and Trinity College Bristol

Full-time teaching staff are eligible for a sabbatical after a defined period of service. Sabbaticals provide staff with the time and opportunity to conduct active research to enhance their knowledge and teaching skills. Staff are supported by the College in presenting papers at national and international conferences and are actively encouraged to publish work. Both undergraduate and postgraduate students commented on the strength of research activity by staff and how this impacted positively on their learning experience.

Have you considered?

- How new staff are inducted into higher education
- How you identify and encourage appropriate staff to participate in CPD
- How staff continue to develop their higher education professional identity
- How you continue to develop your institution's higher education culture and ethos
- Offering support for engagement with the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF)
- Encouraging staff to gain Higher Education Academy (HEA) recognition
- Sharing practice through network events involving other providers or organisations
- Working in partnership with your degree-awarding body/awarding organisation to offer professional development opportunities
- Enabling staff to work-shadow a colleague at a degree-awarding body
- Inviting a peer from another provider to be a mentor
- Running events to meet specific needs (assessment, work-based learning)
- Offering lunchtime workshops tailored to the academic calendar
- Offering opportunities for industrial secondments
- Encouraging and supporting staff to become external examiners and/or reviewers
- Developing web-based teaching resources tailored specifically to support the development of higher education teaching practices
- Targeting courses and training towards areas that have been identified for enhancement at your institution, for example assessment, the use of technology
- Involving students in peer observations and review

Students as independent learners

A key characteristic of UK higher education is the emphasis placed on students' development as independent learners who share responsibility for their learning, its enhancement and the enrichment of their overall experience.

Learning how to think and research independently is a key feature of higher education. Independent learners are motivated to learn and reflect on their own learning. Broadly, independent learning is undertaken outside contact hours, but contributes to programme-specific learning outcomes.

Providers support students in understanding what it means to be an independent learner by:

- discussing with students their expectations of the course - how they are expecting to be taught and assessed
- discussing students' role in lectures, classes, and online discussion forums
- suggesting the development of learning communities outside scheduled contact time, through reading groups and study groups
- peer tutoring at programme level
- giving clear guidance about what is expected of students week to week, for instance the amount of reading they are expected to do and how to approach it
- using exemplars of previous assignments to discuss standards.

Have you considered?

- How you explain the concept of independent learning to students
- How you support your students to develop as independent learners
- How you support students to develop critical thinking, writing and problem-solving skills

- Whether there are sufficient learning resources to support the level of independent learning that is expected?

Feature of good practice

The rich and active research environment, which ensures that students receive the support they need to achieve successful academic, personal and professional outcomes from their research degrees (Expectation B11).

Nazarene Theological College

Students and staff agreed that the most important feature of the research student experience at the College is the opportunity to be part of a vibrant and enriching research community. The residential periods enable students to establish stimulating and supportive relationships with their academic supervisors, their pastoral advisers and their peers.

Additional resources and further references

We have published a suite of four guidance documents for higher education providers, intended to encourage the provision of clear information about higher education learning.

- [Explaining Staff Teaching Qualifications](#)
- [Explaining Class Size](#)
- [Explaining Student Workload](#)
- [Responding To Feedback From Students](#) (PDF, 189KB)

The guidance is not prescriptive but provides practical advice to all providers when considering how best to make available the information about the learning opportunities they offer and to help inform students about what to expect from their higher education experience.

Each document stands alone, but together the four documents are intended to provide a coherent explanation of the elements that make up a complete learning experience. The need for the mutual engagement of both providers and students to ensure the effectiveness of this experience is emphasised throughout.

To complement this guidance, QAA has produced a set of companion guides for current and prospective students.

- [Information on Staff Teaching Qualifications](#) (PDF, 203KB)
- [Information on Class Size](#)
- [Information on Workload](#)
- [Information on How You Can Comment on Your Course](#)

All these publications are available at:

www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance

Case study - Teaching and learning strategies

Navitas UK Holdings Ltd

Independent Learning Charter

Review finding (April 2016)

Navitas UK Holdings Ltd received commendations for the quality and enhancement of its student learning opportunities. QAA identified as good practice 'the Independent Learning Charter, which enshrines Navitas UK's commitment to its values and practices, enabling students to develop their academic and personal potential' (Quality Code, *Chapter B4*).

About the good practice

At Navitas emphasis has been placed on the development of independent learning skills, which have been embedded in the Learning and Teaching Strategy, developed for 2013-18, and mapped against the Quality Code. The Strategy has provided a framework for continuous enhancements, including virtual learning and an Independent Learning Charter. The Independent Learning Charter sets out the ethos that drives the approach for students to develop independent learning techniques and skills. The aim of the Charter is for students to develop skills by stimulating independent learning, analysis and critical thinking, fuelled by 'real world' examples and experiences. The Charter is extremely valuable at college level. Colleges and their university partners recognise the ability to acquire and demonstrate independent learning skills as a key component of degree-level study but also as a key challenge to student success. Interestingly, this is well received not just by international students - the target of the Charter - but also by those coming from further education and school environments, where levels of support follow a different model to higher education. Navitas has used the Charter with its teaching staff to focus on this aspect of learning. Continuing professional development at Navitas recognises different ways of learning experienced by different cultures and nationalities, and considers how to achieve successful outcomes for students. It has also been used at the Student Council and in College Enhancement Teams to engender discussion, raise understanding of the concept and to make it meaningful from a student perspective. Additionally, many of its aims are integrated within a study skills module taken by all students, so while embodied in the Charter it is also embedded in key learning outcomes.

Evaluation and development

Students have been encouraged to review and shape their independent learning through student forums and College Enhancement Teams. At College level the Charter can be localised, encouraging ownership, and students are given the opportunity to discuss and shape their Charter around the stated themes. The Charter is shared via a web portal and other media, allowing students to become familiar with its aims and purpose, and see value in its existence. The feedback is collated and network-wide discussions take place to inform enhancement of the Charter, which will inform future developments.

Student Engagement

This section relates to the participation of students in quality assurance and enhancement processes, including the expression and representation of student views through formal mechanisms.

Student engagement is defined in two distinct ways in the Quality Code (*Chapter B5*), as 'improving the motivation of students to engage in learning and to learn independently' and as 'the participation of students in quality enhancement and quality assurance processes, resulting in the improvement of their educational experience'.

This section uses it in the sense of the latter definition.

What is the scope of student engagement?

The scope of student engagement includes student involvement at any point of the educational journey into which students can offer insight. This encompasses:

- application and admission
- induction and transition into higher education
- programme and curriculum design, delivery and organisation
- curriculum content
- teaching delivery
- learning opportunities
- learning resources
- student support and guidance
- assessment.

How is it demonstrated?

Providers define what student engagement means through consultation with the student body. This will differ from provider to provider depending on a range of factors including mission, context and student population. The diverse nature of UK providers means that one engagement or representation model does not fit all.

Once the definition of student engagement is agreed, a range of formal and informal opportunities for achieving it are promoted across the provider to students and staff and embedded in higher education policies, processes and practices. Ways to communicate the provider's definition of student engagement include through a student charter, student contract or similar documents that stimulate discussion and dialogue between staff and students about their mutual expectations, in particular in relation to student engagement and the student voice.

Senior management play a role in promoting and developing effective student engagement. Quality managers (or equivalent, depending on the organisational structure) and student representation support staff are key to engaging students effectively as the roles are well placed to influence progress, implement policy, design new initiatives and develop proposals on how to embed student involvement in institutional structures and procedures to help shape institutional policies at all levels.

Have you considered?

- Engaging higher education students at all levels in the decision-making in your organisation, from course representatives through to membership of the

- governing body
- The role that senior managers play in promoting the course representative system
- Student representatives meeting with senior staff on a regular, but informal basis, to explore and discuss issues or topics in a more informal setting, prior to (or after) committees to create a much more relaxed and open debate
- Senior management leading by example and seeking regular formal and informal engagement with student representatives, in addition to meeting with them as part of formal committee structures
- Arranging for the head of your organisation to join meetings of student representatives, or inviting higher education students to open meetings
- What is the most appropriate mechanism for advertising the course representatives for each course and how students can get in contact with them
- Who has oversight of the course representative system
- Staff-student consultative committees as a more responsive way of gathering student feedback
- Providing other structured opportunities for course representatives and students to engage in feedback where issues outside the usual agenda of a staff/student liaison committee could be raised
- Offering students opportunities to express individual opinions and experiences, ideas and concerns
- Using a timetabled session to review a course with students
- Enabling students to participate in the design and delivery of programmes
- Involving students in designing the module or programme evaluation questionnaires
- The timing of student feedback questionnaires
- Clearly defining the roles of student representatives in programme and other handbooks
- Developing VLE forums that allow representatives from different courses to communicate to see if there are issues in common (positive or negative)

How do the different elements of student engagement relate to one another?

Student engagement does not stop at quality assurance. All aspects of a provider's higher education provision should embrace and benefit from student engagement. The overall student experience can be enhanced where providers interpret student engagement as being broader than just something that improves the academic experience. For example, when supporting students in such areas as finance, accommodation and disability requirements, it is useful for providers to obtain student input to help set the direction and make improvements to the support (even in a limited way), resulting in a more personalised, student-centred service.

Common practice in module feedback

It is possible to identify a considerable amount of common practice across providers in the mechanisms used to collect and respond to feedback on individual modules.

Module evaluation is most often collected by means of a questionnaire. In some cases other methods are used to collect, or supplement, feedback, such as staff/student meetings or focus groups. Findings may be analysed by the department concerned, or by a central unit (although the arrangements for this may depend on the size/type of provider).

The outcomes from questionnaires are discussed at programme level, often in a staff-student liaison committee (or equivalent). A summary of findings may be published, for example on the virtual learning environment, or the minutes from the committee discussion

may be disseminated.

Findings typically feed into annual monitoring reports (and their resulting action plans) and periodic review, and may also be reported upwards to relevant committees. In some cases, direct intervention (perhaps by the head of department) is triggered when quantitative scores fall below a predefined level.

Some institutions provide a response to feedback in the module handbook, so the next cohort can see what changes have been made. In other cases, students are provided with the outcomes from evaluations to help them make their choice of modules.

How does student engagement lead to improvements?

Collection, publishing and responding to student feedback promotes the enhancement of the learning experience. A well-supported student representative system that sees students' views feeding into and shaping a programme will have a positive effect on students, who see the impact of their engagement.

Have you considered?

- Adopting a deliberate approach to monitoring the success of student engagement
- Monitoring representation across different years to identify variations and trends
- How to share good practice for the election of students
- How student module feedback is reflected in improvements for the subsequent year
- Evaluating student engagement in quality assurance activities through, for example, numbers of students returning module evaluations, attendance at staff-student liaison committees, or feedback on consultations
- Using annual monitoring mechanisms to evaluate student engagement activity and/or staff-student liaison committee systems?

Closing the feedback loop

Providers can gather students' views of their experience in many ways. Typically, this includes feedback collected at the end of a unit of study. They consider these sources of information, take action where appropriate or possible and inform students of the outcomes.

Carrying out surveys or asking students to complete questionnaires is not in itself sufficient. There needs to be clear evidence of closing the loop - informing students about improvements that resulted from their input. This demonstrates to them that the provider is serious about collaborating with them and that their feedback contributes to effective quality assurance and leads to genuine enhancements. Informing students as to how their views and ideas have been acted upon reinforces the validity of their opinions and the importance of their involvement in the wider business of the provider.

Closing the feedback loop is a challenge faced by all higher education providers. Common approaches to it include posting information on the virtual learning environment and/or websites, feeding back through staff-student liaison committees and including information in handbooks. This should be a continuous process integrated into the learning experience and benefiting the students who gave the feedback.

Have you considered?

Communicating the outcome of student feedback through:

- course handbooks
- in-course committee minutes through student representatives
- by e-mail
- informally through contact with academic staff
- through an annual report
- on student notice boards
- Making it clear to students (in, for example, handbooks or through the student charter) that it is their responsibility to provide feedback and that it is the provider's responsibility to act on that feedback and to communicate about this
- How you will give timely feedback so that students remain engaged in the process
- Giving student representatives the opportunity in teaching time to report back on issues to the students they represent
- Introducing mid-module surveys so that current students see the outcomes of their feedback
- Whether augmenting online surveys with a paper-based survey would increase response rates and enable valid evaluation of teaching quality against which improvements can be made
- How the data gathered is used in the most effective way to have an impact on the quality of the learning experience offered to students
- How data is shared beyond programme and departmental level
- Establishing a consistent approach to survey administration that includes a standard set of questions to enable effective benchmarking at course and provider level and allows for bespoke questions for particular programmes

Feature of good practice

The extensive opportunities to engage students as partners in the assurance of their educational experience, including the Student Council (Expectation B5).

St Patrick's International College Ltd

To ensure representation of students at all levels, Student Council Officers recruit representatives from each programme and at every stage. Although voluntary, this is seen by the College as a valuable way of ensuring that student attitudes are regularly conveyed to College management. The Student Experience Team provides training for Student Officers and Representatives and students receive certificates in recognition of their achievements.

Students are encouraged to engage and provide feedback as members of the new Programme Development Committee, Mid Term Board meetings, and Student Council meetings. They are invited to comment on programme development and academic provision and to discuss any academic or non-academic issues with staff.

Additional resources and further references

Effective Course Evaluation: The Future for Quality and Standards in Higher Education
www.slideshare.net/surveyresults/effective-course-evaluation-the-future-for-quality-and-standards-in-higher-education

Closing the Loop: Are Universities Doing Enough to Act on Student Feedback from Course Evaluation Surveys? www.swan.ac.uk/media/Closing_per_cent20the_per_cent20Loop_per_cent20Report.pdf (PDF, 264KB)

Reflecting the diversity of your student population

A student population can include international students, distance learners, those located on an alternative campus, students on placement, part-time students, and visiting/exchange students. Students and providers work together to design a range of formal and informal opportunities for engagement and establish a representative model that incorporates different routes to representation and removes barriers to engagement.

All students should be aware of the opportunities available for engagement. Raising awareness of representation and highlighting the role and importance of the student voice during induction is useful but perhaps not the best time to impart detail. Where institutions had taken a proactive approach to following up induction with carefully targeted campaigns, increased levels of engagement and interest were evident. Training is tailored to meet the needs of different student groups using a range of formats, for example, face-to-face, online or through group discussion. This makes training more easily accessible to distance learning students, for example. Student representatives are also provided with the appropriate background to some of the current key issues and discussions within the organisation, and are given ongoing support throughout the year.

Technology plays an important role in addressing some of the barriers, enabling students to access meetings where physical attendance is not possible. Virtual learning environments (VLEs) and social media offer avenues for student representation and communication.

Have you considered?

- How to reduce barriers to participation, especially among part-time students and other traditionally harder to reach groups
- Establishing a staff role to engage specifically with distance learners, part-time students and other traditionally harder to reach groups
- Establishing a student engagement officer to support student representation and development activity
- Scheduling committee meetings to allow part-time students to attend
- Creating online opportunities for distance learners to contribute remotely, either via conference calling or through discussion in the VLE
- Using VLEs to host information about course committees to make it widely available to all students on a programme, or to host discussion forums for all students to discuss concerns and issues, and to publish minutes and external examiner reports
- Using VLEs to host all relevant survey data, information, reports and papers in one central place, making information more accessible to all students and easier to navigate
- Making information available through mobile technologies including smart phones, tablets and laptops
- Using text messaging as a means of informing students and student representatives about forthcoming meetings to increase feedback and participation rates
- Developing Facebook pages or similar at programme level where all students can raise issues
- Using Twitter with hashtags as a forum where student representatives can exchange views and ideas
- Rewarding or providing forms of recognition for those students who participate in voluntary activities outside the formal academic and assessment structures, in recognition of the fact that these activities have made an important contribution towards enhancing their learning (personal development planning, printing credits)

What kind of training should students be offered?

While the Quality Code does not demand that providers offer training to facilitate engagement, students need to feel equipped to contribute effectively.

Research (The Open University, 2009) has shown the importance of communicating any representative system in a clear and carefully targeted way, underpinned by a comprehensive support and training programme. This enables students to develop their understanding and skills to fulfil a representative role confidently and effectively.

Focusing on committee participation may not be the most appropriate method of student engagement. Clarity of role and the extent to which student representatives are informed about the business of a committee is central to success, as is emphasising the importance of inclusive chairing and making specific efforts to brief chairs to encourage student participation and manage other participants' responses appropriately.

Have you considered?

- Developing job descriptions outlining student representative duties and responsibilities
- Developing training and support materials
- Arranging peer mentoring for student representatives
- Providing higher education student representatives with handbooks or hand-outs, and induction, that explain about quality assurance and enhancement and the Quality Code
- Establishing staff roles to support student representatives who participate in senior and complex committees
- Modifying terms of reference to be more accessible to students
- Introducing student business on committee agendas alongside the traditional chair's business, to enable student representatives to raise issues on behalf of the wider student body
- Producing a regular newsletter for course representatives to keep them in touch with developments in the organisation

How does student engagement link to quality assurance?

Annual monitoring and periodic programme review play an influential role in the quality management of programmes. Many providers have in place policies such as the inclusion of student representatives on quality committees as full members (see also 'Monitoring and review', page 72).

Have you considered?

- Taking steps to ensure that committee panels (or equivalent) are given an opportunity to receive views and comments directly from students currently taking the programme
- Using a structured method of discussion, asking staff and students simultaneously, but independently, to evaluate a programme and then bringing them together to look at, and discuss, the results
- The role of students in monitoring processes, including the materials made available to them, including student module evaluation questionnaire analysis, external examiner reports and programme team responses

What if there are no formal student engagement structures?

If your organisation has no formal structures for representing higher education students, it is still possible to engage them in quality assurance. Beyond formal student representation on committees, there are many informal ways to get students involved. Where there is a strong culture of student engagement, staff members can discover students' views through informal interactions, with a resultant impact on policy and processes. Providers may also develop systems to capture the outcomes of informal interactions.

Case study - Student engagement

Navitas UK Holdings Ltd

Student support mechanisms

Review finding (April 2016)

Navitas UK Holdings Ltd received commendations for the quality and enhancement of its student learning opportunities. QAA identified as good practice 'the Student in Jeopardy programme, which identifies student needs and provides the support required to enable them to succeed' (Quality Code, Chapter B4).

About the action taken

Student welfare and overall experience is of utmost importance to Navitas. Student attendance is monitored closely and any absence is investigated to ascertain what can be done to assist the student, including home visits if necessary. Students under 18 years of age, those with a disability, or those underperforming are placed in the Student in Jeopardy programme. A learning plan is developed to ensure that the student receives the extra academic and general support required.

At Birmingham City University International College (BCUIC) the Student in Jeopardy programme has been adapted to encompass feedback from all staff who interface with students, leading to more effective and timely interventions. The aim is to combine both qualitative and quantitative feedback: academics are encouraged to report concerns to the academic management team on a weekly basis; attendance is monitored closely and discussed at the Academic Board, where individual cases or trends within groups or classes can be identified. Coupled with the often qualitative input from BCUIC staff holding a pastoral remit, the scheme permits an insightful, holistic view of each student. The actions taken are also individualised, so while there is a standard approach to monitoring a student's performance once they join the programme, a more pastoral approach may be taken to, for example, remedy culture shock. Student 'buddies' can also provide informal support through a difficult patch. A subject group with low attendance might lead to an evaluation of the teaching approach within that module. London Brunel International College (LBIC) holds academic and welfare surgeries on a regular basis, and reviews cases in a positive way in order to enhance the student's individual experience at LBIC.

Evaluation and development

Navitas evaluates and develops the Student in Jeopardy programme via a UK-wide forum of operational college staff. At BCUIC a structured meeting to review academic staff feedback is held twice per semester, at which quantitative data is shared alongside the qualitative feedback from both teams, thus providing a 'break point' at which evaluation is conducted. The operation of the programme and how it can be enhanced is shared at student forums, including the Student Council, to provide further insight into how the framework operates from a student perspective.

Additional resources and further references

Report to HEFCE on Student Engagement:
Centre for Higher Education Research and Information, Open University
www.open.ac.uk/cheri/documents/student-engagement-report.pdf (PDF, 851KB)

Student Engagement in Learning and Teaching Quality Management: A Good Practice Guide for Higher Education Providers and Students' Unions:
www.bath.ac.uk/learningandteaching/pdf/student_engagement/Good_Practice_Guide_11.9.2013.pdf (PDF, 575KB)

Higher Education Academy, Collecting and Using Student Feedback: A Guide to Good Practice: www.heacademy.ac.uk/node/3008

National Union of Students, Rewarding Reps and Accreditation:
www.nusconnect.org.uk/the-student-engagement-partnership-tsep/supporting-course-reps/rewarding-reps-and-accreditation

Supporting higher education students

This section is about how providers support students through their higher education journey, with reference to the Chapters of Part B of the Quality Code.

Programme design, development and approval

Policies and procedures

The processes of programme design, development and approval are an essential element of providers' internal quality assurance and enhancement. They ensure that appropriate academic standards are set and maintained and that the learning opportunities offered to students enable them to achieve the intended learning outcomes for their programmes.

Ultimate responsibility for the approval of programmes rests with degree-awarding bodies/awarding organisations. However, all providers are involved in elements of programme design, development and approval, including programme re-approval, major changes (which may involve reconsidering a programme's aims and design), minor changes, and closure.

The extent to which roles and authority in this area are delegated by a degree-awarding body/awarding organisation to its partner provider(s) is defined in the agreement between the two bodies. Where providers have responsibility for designing programmes they put in place internal approval processes that may mirror those of their degree-awarding body/awarding organisation and are systematically applied and consistently operated.

Providers operate a process for the approval of higher education provision that demonstrates:

- strategic fit
- demand and financial viability
- high quality learning opportunities
- robust academic standards.

Decisions about what programmes to offer will be taken within the context of providers' individual missions and other strategic factors, including advice from external bodies such as employers and industry about workforce needs.

In strategic terms, programme planning approval processes enable providers to assure themselves that sufficient and appropriate staffing, learning spaces and other learning resources and facilities are available.

Programme design, development and approval depend on reflection and critical self-assessment both individually by staff and collectively within the organisational structures.

Programme approval involves a number of stages and various staff members and students at the provider as well as external advisers such as employers and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies. Those involved are clear about their individual role, the hierarchy of procedures and the point at which the degree-awarding body/awarding organisation definitively approves the programme for delivery. Although some stages may seem similar, they provide a different perspective or focus, and each is important to ensure that any proposal has been adequately considered by all relevant parties.

Higher education provision is dynamic, and programmes are continually evaluated and revised to improve the learning experience and maintain the currency of the curriculum. Internal monitoring and review processes play a major role in programme evolution.

Have you considered?

- Whether the design of each programme is aligned to the provider's strategic mission and goals
- Whether programme design, development and approval processes operate as part of strategic and academic resource planning and are informed by both academic merit and the business case
- Whether programme design, development and approval processes are coherent, transparent and understood by staff, students and other stakeholders
- Whether programme approval processes clearly detail realistic timescales, terminology, roles, responsibilities, levels of authority and the hierarchy of procedures
- Whether decision making is objective and impartial
- Whether information on programme design, development and approval, changes and closure processes is accessible to all those who need to know about it
- How programme design, development and approval processes are applied to Higher National programmes

Programme rationale and purpose

Proposals have significant staff, student and employer input from the earliest stages of development, and staff should be able to articulate clearly the rationale and purpose of the programme.

Proposals may include, among other aspects:

- an explanation as to how the programme aligns with the provider's strategic aims,
- the identification of the intended student profile
- outcomes of any market research that evidences a recruitment and employment market, employer and student expectations, and any professional body requirements
- the intended purpose(s) of the programme, which may include personal, professional, vocational and/or academic development; or preparation for specific or general employment
- the intended learning outcomes necessary to meet the programme's purpose
- the mechanisms by which students will demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the learning outcomes
- organisational aspects such as the workload and the volume and nature of assessment necessary for students to meet the intended learning outcomes
- details of the level of the qualification, its credit value,⁷ and its alignment with internal, national and other relevant frameworks
- how inclusive practices in learning and teaching take account of the entitlements of students with protected characteristics
- relevant qualitative and quantitative data used to inform programme design and development, including market research, student performance and feedback, and, where possible, data disaggregated by protected characteristics

⁷ According to the credit frameworks; see: www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/academic-credit.

- a definitive record of the programme (the programme specification).

Have you considered?

Whether the design of the programme:

- makes appropriate use of the Qualifications Frameworks, in particular *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ)
- makes use of the relevant Subject Benchmark Statement(s) and, if applicable, the Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark
- makes appropriate use of the Credit Frameworks
- reflects relevant provider strategies and policies (for example on admissions, assessment, teaching and learning, and equal opportunities)
- makes appropriate use of other helpful non-mandatory reference points such as QAA's guidance on enterprise and entrepreneurship education⁸ and on education for sustainable development⁹
- provides an appropriate level of academic challenge and rigour in accordance with the Subject Benchmark Statements, the academic standards set by the degree-awarding body/awarding organisation, and any other relevant reference points
- develops students' capabilities, including their ability to manage their own learning, and provides them with adequate opportunities to achieve the specified learning outcomes
- provides students with adequate employment-related opportunities and other 'skills for the twenty-first century graduate', as appropriate¹⁰

Staff involvement in design, development and approval

Processes for programme design, development and approval involve staff from across the provider, including academic teaching staff and professional services staff. Providers enable all those involved in this area to fulfil their role effectively, through appropriate support, training and continuing personal and professional development.

Have you considered?

- How all those involved in programme design, development and approval (both internal and external participants) are supported to fulfil their roles through appropriate training and support
- How staff are enabled to work together, drawing on collective experiences and developing innovative ideas
- How staff who have not been part of the design, development and approval of the programme, but are involved in teaching or supporting student learning will gain an understanding of the aims, structure and content of the programme
- Arranging for staff unfamiliar with programme design and the processes of development and approval to work alongside or observe a more experienced colleague, for example through observation or membership of programme

⁸ Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Education: Guidance for UK Higher Education Providers: www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/enterprise-entrepreneurship-guidance.pdf (PDF, 259KB).

⁹ Education for Sustainable Development: Guidance for UK Higher Education Providers: www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=533.

¹⁰ See also the QAA Scotland Enhancement Theme on this topic: www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/enhancement-themes/completed-enhancement-themes/graduates-for-the-21st-century.

- approval panels
- Facilitating staff involvement in programme design, development and approval processes at other providers

Student engagement in design, development and approval

Students are able to make a valuable contribution to their own higher education experience and that of others. Their involvement in programme design, development and approval processes may be formal or informal, and is proportionate to the activity taking place, and should be representative of the student body (including those students with protected characteristics). Formal student input can be face-to-face - for example by means of discussion at staff-student liaison committees - or through surveys or questionnaires. Informal student input can be obtained through discussions with current students on related programmes (or on the actual programme, for significant amendments) at the end of lectures or through virtual learning forums, and/or through discussions with recent graduates (of related or actual programmes).

Have you considered?

- Collecting the views of students on proposed programme content through focus groups or by including students on panels taking decisions on programme approval
- Collecting feedback from students studying in cognate areas, or on modules that address study skills (for example, personal development planning)
- Asking students to identify issues relating to equality of opportunity within the programme, the balance of workload and assessment
- How you clarify for students the place of the proposed new programme within the provider's existing portfolio of courses
- Supporting students' contribution to programme design, development and approval processes by means of appropriate training

External input and scrutiny

External input is fundamental to programme approval, to bring objectivity and independence to decisions taken and to contribute to the setting and maintenance of academic standards. External perspectives and advice also contribute to the enhancement of a programme. Individuals may be drawn from other subject areas or professional services within the organisation or from other higher education providers, depending on their role.

Have you considered?

Seeking advice from:

- academic staff from a different subject area within the provider
- staff with professional services expertise, such as library and learning resources staff
- staff from other providers
- contacts made through partnerships, at other providers, in industry or professional practice
- contacts from academic subject associations and the Higher Education Academy
- contacts from relevant sector networks, such as those concerned with developments in pedagogy and technology-enhanced learning
- representatives of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies, whether or not the programme is regulated or accredited
- external examiners

- employers, for example through industrial advisory boards
- the local enterprise partnership
- organisations in the communities with which the provider works
- alumni and/or students studying in cognate areas

The nature and extent of external input to programme design, development and approval is proportionate to the stage of the process or the decision being made. For example, the design of a wholly new programme often draws on a wider range of external advice in design, development and approval than the approval of minor changes to existing provision.

Evaluation

Providers regularly evaluate programme design, development and approval processes to ensure they remain effective and fit for purpose. Highlighted good practice is disseminated and opportunities for improvement are identified. Student views contribute to the evaluation; for example, students may be asked to reflect on whether the approval processes provide sufficient opportunity for student input.

Case study - Programme offer and module choice

Royal School of Needlework

Enhancing students' employability

Review finding (June 2014)

The Royal School of Needlework (RSN) received a commendation for the quality of its student learning opportunities. QAA identified as a feature of good practice: 'the extensive involvement of employers and students in programme design and development' (Quality Code, *Chapter B1*).

About the good practice

Students develop their creative practice through a unit-based curriculum, engaging with leading-edge practitioners and working to real-time projects and schedules. This is both a motivator and an enabler. Students on the BA (Hons) Hand Embroidery for Fashion, Interiors and Textile Art develop a visual language, and problem-solving and making skills, underpinned by competency in analysis and research. The course offers flexible approaches to learning, taught by project, enabling students to develop an evolving skill set in hand embroidery together with complementary critical and self-reflective skills.

The RSN is a niche provider that has established an international reputation for excellence in hand embroidery. Study is in small groups at its unique 'campus' at Hampton Court Palace. Degree students learn in an environment that holds teaching and study at its heart, supported by resources that include a textile archive and handling collection. The RSN Studio is a commercial space creating private commissioned works for external clients at an international level.

Level 5 (second year) BA (Hons) degree students have the opportunity to study on a live project with external collaborators who change from year to year. The study unit enables learning across a range of platforms, and outcomes with more than one client.

Evaluation and development

Evaluation is undertaken both formally and informally throughout the academic year. Regular meetings for discussion and evaluation are held each term between student representatives and course leaders. Actions can then be progressed by the Course Board, which meets once a term and reports to the degree-awarding body, the University for the

Creative Arts. Students evaluate their own progress through tutorials and reflective practice, including annotated journals, research files, design sheets and peer discussion. Staff evaluate student learning against client briefs. Live projects are reviewed through the annual review cycle. Clients are involved in the evaluation and feedback process, and a number of them have offered RSN students and graduates internships or employment.

Recruitment, selection and admission to higher education

What do we mean by recruitment, selection and admission?

Recruitment activities are targeted at individuals who are actively weighing up the prospect of entering or continuing in higher education. Selection is the process by which a higher education provider considers the applications for places on a programme and decides which individuals to accept. The post admissions boundary is the point at which a prospective student who has been accepted for a programme enrolls with a provider and becomes a current student.

Principles of fair admissions

Sound practice in accordance with *Chapter B2* of the Quality Code is underpinned by the 'principles of fair admissions' set out by the Schwartz Report (2004).¹¹ This states that a fair admissions system should:

- be transparent
- enable higher education providers to select students who are able to complete the programme as judged by their achievements and their potential
- strive to use assessment methods that are reliable and valid
- seek to minimise barriers for applicants
- be professional in every respect and underpinned by appropriate organisational structures and processes.

Effective student engagement with the application process (which for the purposes of the toolkit is set at the point where a prospective student enrolls with a provider and becomes a current student) will maximise a provider's ability to select students who are able to complete their programme and ensure all students have a good applicant experience. The applicant experience will be enhanced where different activities and disparate teams are integrated across all stages of recruitment, selection and admission.

Strategic considerations

Admissions policies and procedures ensure that the provider's mission and its values are reflected in recruitment, selection and admission processes, including how the provider engages with applicants, whether or not they are offered a place.

A comprehensive admissions policy may formally recognise the importance to a provider of particular aspects of recruitment, selection and admission (for example, widening access), and is likely to set out what this means in context.

The policy or policies, which cover all modes and levels of study at the provider, support staff professionalism and coherent practice, and facilitate measuring and monitoring. (Part C:

¹¹ Schwartz Report (2004) Fair Admissions to Higher Education: Recommendations for Good Practice, available at: www.spa.ac.uk/resources/schwartz-report.

Information about Higher Education Provision).

Where providers work with degree-awarding bodies/awarding organisations or with other delivery organisations, written agreements between the parties specify which of them is responsible for recruitment, selection and admissions processes (or how these responsibilities are shared).

Staff involvement in the admissions process

Providers have policies and procedures in place with which all staff involved in recruitment, selection and admission are familiar, and to which they adhere. Such staff (who may include academic as well as administrative staff) are fully briefed on the requirements of their role.

Policies and procedures clarify who is authorised to undertake admission decisions and where authority and responsibility for each stage of the admissions process lies.

Providers ensure all staff (including those working outside the organisation, nationally or internationally) who engage with applicants and /or the application process have sufficient experience, have up-to-date knowledge and are appropriately trained to carry out their roles in a professional manner. This knowledge and training is likely to ensure:

- considerate and timely interactions with prospective students and their advisers
- transparent, efficient and effective communication with other interested parties such as parents or employers
- thorough checking of applications to ensure that prospective students meet the necessary entry requirements, including those specified by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs)
- the ability to devise ways of enabling prospective students from a range of different backgrounds to demonstrate their potential to succeed in their studies
- signposting to additional advice and guidance
- commitment to training, CPD and professional development regarding admissions procedures.

Staff development and training

Providers will normally be able to identify and address training needs through their staff appraisal processes. However, providers may wish to consider whether additional training is appropriate, for example, where academic staff are involved in interviewing applicants (which would require them to be familiar with the application process, interview procedures and good practice). Staff with decision making responsibilities may require equality and diversity training or briefing in a range of potential entry routes, to counteract potential bias that can arise from educational and cultural differences; this will enable them to recognise the potential of applicants seeking to enter higher education through a variety of different routes.

Appeals and complaints

Providers include their admissions appeals and complaints procedure within the admissions policy, or clearly link it to a separate appeals and complaints procedure while stating their commitment to a fair and professional handling of complaints in the admission policy itself. Where providers include admissions appeals and complaints procedures within a general student appeals and complaints policy which is readily accessible to prospective students, the relevant policy document, as well as the admission policy should make this clear.

The decision-making process

Providers have a clear timetable for considering the quality assurance mechanisms they have in place for monitoring and evaluating their admissions process and their feedback policies and procedures, and for reporting on these through internal committee structures. They also have effective mechanisms to ensure changes are communicated to relevant staff.

Data is collected and analysed where available. This may include the analysis of data and statistics on applications, offers and acceptances; it may also include reflection upon how internal and external developments have impacted upon admissions processes, or upon feedback from staff in relation to their operation and efficacy.

Providers regularly review their application materials and processes to ensure they remain fit for purpose, that they do not unduly discriminate against any potential applicant groups and that any supporting information, advice and guidance required to complete a suitable application is reasonably accessible.

Providers may have little to no involvement in the review or development of the admissions policy, depending upon their delegated responsibilities. However, strong channels of communication should be in place for briefing staff about changes or policy updates. Where a provider works with several degree-awarding bodies/awarding organisations particular care should be taken to manage the different admissions policies.

Information to help students make informed decisions

Accessible, reliable and trustworthy information is necessary to ensure that prospective students understand the nature of the learning experience they can expect on particular programmes. Such information enables applicants to make informed choices in the light of their career aspirations and preferred learning styles, and ensures that the investment they make will be based on an accurate understanding of what is offered.

Prospective students will rely on information and advice available as part of their application to assist them in reaching an informed decision. High-quality, up-to-date and accurate information, advice and guidance is made readily available to prospective students.

Channels and media for communication are likely to include:

- prospectuses and related literature
- websites
- Key Information Sets
- promotional materials including for example leaflets and videos
- provider events such as open days and pre-sessional events.

Through these channels, prospective students are offered information about their intended programmes of study, including (but not exhaustively):

- the content, including the individual modules and the definitive record or programme specification
- the entry requirements
- the level and mode of study
- where teaching is located, especially when this takes place: across different campuses; off-campus through third-party organisations; or via a range of media (as in flexible or distributed learning)
- total programme costs including tuition fees and other additional costs

- details of any financial support that may be available, including needs-based bursaries and academic scholarships (and their eligibility criteria)
- appeals and complaints policies and procedures (including appealing admissions decisions)
- professional body accreditation and career/progression routes.

Potential students can also expect to find information about the demands of higher education study generally, the nature of the application process, and what support might be available to applicants. This is likely to include details about:

- how the UCAS12 Tariff and recognition of prior learning (RPL) are used to determine whether entry requirements are met
- stages and timescales of the application and admissions processes and
- how applicants' suitability will be assessed
- alternative pathways, including for disabled students
- how to apply for the Disabled Students' Allowance
- flexible learning opportunities
- childcare
- the proportion of Welsh-language teaching available (where applicable)
- the use of contextual data and information, for example educational, geo-demographic and socio-economic background data, to help support applicants in making an informed decision.

Further guidance on providing information for prospective students can be found in Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision. Guidance on providing information for prospective research degree students can be found in *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*.

Minimising barriers for applicants

Providers make admissions policies, which should be available on request in different formats, clear and accessible to external audiences through their website. Policies and procedures detail how and to whom applicants should apply. Where a provider operates under the admissions policy of its degree-awarding body/awarding organisation, providers make this clear to prospective students and applicants. Links may be provided to the policy and other documents on the partner's website.

Transparency

Providers have policies and procedures in place that are clear and explicit and cover everything from initial enquiries through to formal application. The admissions policy makes it clear whether additional assessments, for example in the form of interviews, auditions, tests, submission of portfolios and so on form part of the application process for certain programmes, how these methods will be used, and how the outcomes inform the selection process.

Admissions policies include details about the process for making selection decisions, and the timescales involved. Procedures for recording and justifying selection decisions are systematically and consistently implemented. Offers made are clear and easy to understand, and consistent with published entry requirements.

Providers may offer feedback to unsuccessful applicants, either automatically or on request, and have an established complaints and appeals procedure that is transparent

¹² Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, available at: www.ucas.com; for information about the revised Tariff, see: www.ucas.com/advisers/guides-and-resources/tariff-2017.

and easily found. Giving feedback offers providers the opportunity to enhance the applicant experience and their own reputation. It allows applicants to be better prepared for future applications and interviews and move constructively forward. However, it is for the provider to determine the nature and extent of feedback they provide. This should be made clear in the admissions policy.

Providers review student numbers and targets regularly. They pre-empt likely programme closures by arranging alternative programmes or progression routes for students, either an alternative within the organisation, or a programme at a different provider. There are clear channels for communication of programme changes, and providers provide relevant additional information, advice, guidance and support for affected students at the earliest opportunity.

Have you considered?

- Having a section tailored specifically to higher education admission in your further education admissions policy, if a separate higher admissions policy does not exist
- Whether your admissions policy is informed by strategy and the provider's mission and values
- Whether you have clear policies and procedures in place for all your recruitment, selection and admission activities
- How everyone involved in recruitment, selection and admission (including staff based outside the provider, nationally or internationally) know, understand and implement policy
- Whether academic staff are adequately trained to carry out interviews
- How you know that policy translates into practice
- How you monitor, evaluate and refine your policies and procedures
- What statistical reporting procedures are in place to inform senior management about higher education course admissions
- How unsuccessful students can appeal against a decision
- What lessons have been learnt from appeals, complaints and feedback
- Whether and how you offer feedback to unsuccessful applicants
- Whether there are clear and timely channels for communication of programme changes
- Establishing a formal process for checking that information for prospective students is fit for purpose, complete and consistently presented, and that it can be easily accessed and understood
- Publishing programme specifications alongside or in the prospectus

Feature of good practice

The detailed care taken in the admissions process to identify the strengths and needs of individual students (Expectations B2 and B4).

London School of Academics Ltd

The College has a well-structured and defined admissions process that ensures all prospective students are treated equally and fairly. This is working well in practice and the individual attention offered to applicants is appreciated by students.

Staff are carefully selected to be on the admissions team and undergo effective training to ensure that they meet the requirements of the admissions process in a fair manner, with a view to considering each prospective student on an individual basis. The interview checklist provides a secure basis for the conduct of interviews. There is an effective appeals process available to applicants.

The minutes of the Recruitment and Admissions Review indicate reflection on the process through the admissions team meetings, which have led to actions including a more robust approach to telephone interviews, an increase in the number of interviewers present at each interview from one to two, and the formalisation of guidance for staff.

The College enrolls students from a diverse range of backgrounds and with a wide diversity of qualifications on entry. Students spoke in positive terms of the supportive care offered by the College to ensure that their diverse needs were identified at entry: the success of students in finding employment after completion attests to the thoroughness of this care.

Additional resources and further references

Supporting Professionalism in Admissions (SPA), web-based resource: www.spa.ac.uk

Schwartz Report (2004): Fair Admissions to Higher Education: Recommendations for Good Practice: www.spa.ac.uk/resources/schwartz-report

Competition and Market Authority (CMA) UK Higher Education Providers Advice on Consumer Protection Law:
www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/415740/HE_providers_-_advice_on_consumer_protection_law.pdf (PDF, 663KB)

Induction and transition into higher education

This subsection explores how induction establishes students' expectations about studying at higher education level and about engagement in quality assurance.

What do we mean by induction and transition?

Students should be ready to engage in their higher education and be enthusiastic about the opportunities on offer. To achieve this, induction into higher education starts before students arrive. Successful applicants value meeting staff and current students to provide them with advance information about the provider and the learning experience.

The most effective pre-entry interventions include:

- providing information about the organisation and the programme
- informing expectations relating to the academic experience including independent learning and academic skills that characterise higher education
- building social capital (links with peers, current students and staff that can subsequently be used for communication, information and support)
- nurturing a sense of belonging.

Preparing students in advance for the academic environment, and enabling them to develop realistic expectations, can be achieved through a range of media including pre-arrival support materials, social media, summer schools and lectures.

The transition to higher education and the need to develop skills as independent and autonomous learners will challenge students in ways that could cause discomfiture and dissatisfaction as they adjust to the demands of higher-level study. For some students, it may be a considerable challenge to develop a habit of engagement commensurate with the learning outcomes expected of graduates and postgraduates. This challenge should be supported by a structured learning programme, with appropriate academic support at each stage, so that the learner is able to progress and demonstrate the appropriate outcomes.

The learner must be an active participant in this process, aware of mutual responsibilities, owing to this expectation being embedded in the public information provided by the organisation.¹³

Have you considered?

- Offering one-off initiatives to support transition
- Offering modules that introduce the core study skills required for higher education programmes, such as academic writing skills, critical thinking and research skills

Induction can include content and activities that encourage students to adopt a proactive, critical and cross-disciplinary approach to their higher education study. It can publicise to students the opportunities for, and impact of, engaging as partners in the quality of their higher education experience.

Induction aims to alleviate the problems associated with transition and help new students adapt to their new circumstances as learners and participants in the higher education environment. It is critical to student success and to their sense of association with the provider. The emphasis should be on integrated, coordinated activity between support services and academic support, schools, departments and the diverse group of students who enter higher education from a variety of backgrounds.

Feature of good practice

The strategic, professional and practice-led approach to teaching, which is effectively supported by ongoing research and development (Expectation B3).

West Dean College - The Edward James Foundation

The approach to the provision of the learning and teaching environment clearly follows from the College strategic vision and ethos. There is much emphasis on the small group nature, the workshop base and the specialist expertise of the staff. The quality and impact of the learning environment is high; support to students is comprehensive across practical, theoretical and contextual elements, and effective learning is being delivered in this environment.

Have you considered?

How your induction programme:

- is inclusive of all student groups
- addresses the needs of a particular group
- integrates teaching staff and student services
- provides time-relevant targeted information that is readily accessible
- provides students with informal opportunities to get to know their teaching staff
- is part of an ongoing programme
- encompasses social, personal, cultural and academic processes of transition
- develops students' understanding of academic expectations and procedures
- offers opportunities for interaction between new and established students
- allows students who are unhappy with their programme to transfer
- is evaluated

¹³ Further information can be found in Responding to Feedback from Students: Guidance about Providing Information for Students: www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=201.

Case study

SAE Education Ltd

Student retention project

Review finding (June 2016)

SAE Education Ltd received two commendations: one for the quality of its student learning opportunities and another for its enhancement of student learning opportunities. QAA identified as good practice 'the effective integration of professional and academic support' (Quality Code, Chapter B4 and Enhancement) and 'the strategic approach to the development of the Alumni Network' (Enhancement).

About the good practice

As student numbers grow, it is essential that a high quality student experience is maintained that effectively supports students to achieve their full potential and complete their studies. SAE Education Ltd (SAE) recognised the need for student retention to be monitored more closely to ensure that any issues impacting on student retention were identified, and that strategies and interventions drawing on best practice were regularly reviewed and implemented.

SAE's retention project centred on ensuring that student retention data was robust and visible to academic and professional staff. During the 2015-16 academic year, SAE realigned its administrative staff infrastructure, establishing a network of Student Experience Officers across all four UK campuses. Their remit has been to enhance student information, pastoral support and student records, working closely with campus management as well as with their student experience and finance functional leads. The recent appointment of a dean for the UK region to lead on academic and student services also reflects SAE's commitment to the continuous improvement of student experience and achievement.

Another aspect of the student lifecycle that has enhanced student retention is the development of the SAE Alumni Association. Its core mission is to support all of its members in discovering job opportunities, linking them with the creative media industries, and improving their skills and employment prospects through an extensive industry speakers programme. The process of engaging students in the Association's motto of 'Connect, Learn, Succeed!' begins at open days and induction: industry insights are provided, and students are encouraged to begin envisioning possible employment pathways based on their talents, interests, chosen discipline of study and corresponding roles in industry.

Evaluation and development

Through the new student experience team structure, students have benefitted from enhanced joining instructions, including: SAE emails for life; a new student induction programme; expansion of library and learning facilities, with seminars on academic support; as well as enhanced student progression procedures, including aligned attendance monitoring. This cross-institutional approach to the student experience, along with SAE's Alumni Association, has enabled SAE to identify early intervention strategies to enhance student retention and foster a student community that enhances student development and achievement.

Progression and transition to work or further study

This subsection invites you to consider how well you are preparing students for their progression and transition to further academic or professional awards, or employment.

During students' period of study their learning environment is likely to change. Higher education providers manage this in such a way as to enable them to develop and progress.

Developing academic skills

Academic skills are those generic and transferable skills that underpin higher education learning, enabling students to become confident, independent, critical thinkers and reflective learners. Providers consider ways in which they can enable students to develop their academic potential through the development of such skills as reasoning, research, numeracy, writing and referencing. Such provision takes account of the needs of a diverse body of students and is appropriate to the level of study. For example, many first-year students have to adapt to new learning and teaching methods.

Providers encourage students to become effective learners who make the most of the opportunities on offer and acknowledge how developing appropriate academic skills will benefit them in their future careers. Providers help students to do this through personal development planning (PDP) and by helping them to identify their personal, academic and employability needs, reflect on their experiences, and record their achievements.

Feature of good practice

The provision of online access to library and study skills resources enables student development and achievement (Expectation B4).

The Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust

The electronic library is extensively used. Students at the Tavistock and in national centres are allocated a personal librarian and they can have face to face sessions on referencing and information retrieval or use online support. The part-time nature and distributed location of the students places heavy demands on electronic support. A wide range of study skills, including research skills, is now embedded in courses on the VLE following liaison between the library and academic tutors.

Have you considered?

- How you prepare level 5 (foundation degree students) for level 6 (top-up study at bachelor's level)
- Embedding the teaching of academic skills throughout the curriculum
- Developing online support guides
- Offering one-to-one support
- Offering tutorial sessions or seminars that include academic skills development

Personal development planning (PDP)

The primary objectives of PDP are to enhance the capacity of students to reflect, plan and take responsibility for their own learning and to understand what and how they learn. PDP is based on the skills of reflection and planning that are integral to knowing how to learn in different contexts and to transfer that learning throughout life.

PDP results in enhanced self-awareness regarding strengths and weaknesses, and what

needs to change. The process helps learners understand the value added through learning that is above and beyond the formally scheduled opportunities for the subjects they study. Crucially, it relates to their development as a whole person, but also has benefits for others with whom they interact, including academic staff.

Providers have a strategy and policy framework for implementing, monitoring and enhancing their PDP provision. PDP has a clear presence at programme level that encourages students to take ownership of their own PDP practice, processes and records.

Have you considered?

- Offering staff development opportunities to help them implement PDP
- How the views of students, staff and employers inform the enhancement of PDP practice
- How PDP is implemented to support the needs of particular groups of students
- How and when students receive advance information on support for PDP in their programme
- Offering students opportunities to engage in PDP activities at each stage of the programme and across a range of learning contexts
- How students feedback on their experience of PDP provision

Additional resources and further references

A Toolkit for Enhancing Personal Development Planning Strategy, Policy and Practice in Higher Education Institutions: www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/PDP-toolkit-second-ed.pdf (PDF, 564KB)

Personal Development Planning: Guidance for Institutional Policy and Practice in Higher Education: www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/Personal-development-planning-guidance-for-institutional-policy-and-practice-in-higher-education.pdf (PDF, 245KB)

Ward, R, et al (revised edition 2009) Personal Development Planning and Employability, Learning and Employability Series 2, York: The Higher Education Academy www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/esect_pdp.pdf (PDF, 285KB)

Employability and career management

Developing skills for employability

Working in partnership with students and employers, providers develop strategies to promote students' employability and their ability to transfer their knowledge, skills, attitudes and values into real-life contexts. Strategies take into account the student profile and the diverse aspirations of individual students, as well as the programme portfolio, to offer a mix of curricular, co-curricular and extracurricular approaches.

Facilitating career management

Career education, information, advice and guidance enable students to make choices about their future. Providers ensure that all staff and, where relevant, external agents involved are appropriately informed about the local, regional, national and international graduate labour market. Providers engage with employers and, where appropriate, professional, regulatory and statutory bodies. Students have access to appropriate, well informed careers advice and impartial, student-centred, confidential careers guidance.

Feature of good practice

The use of 'live briefs' to promote students' engagement with current sector practices, challenges and developments (Expectation B3).

Istituto Marangoni

The development of design skills is central to the programmes and students are expected to develop their practical skills as part of their programme, before and during work placements, as well as through workshops. Tutors support students through ongoing feedback on practical work, and external examiners have commented favourably on the quality of work produced. Students are also able to engage with 'live briefs', which reflect current challenges and projects within the sector. Students are able to develop proposals and present their findings to a panel which includes external sector experts. The students reported that they value the experience these briefs provide.

Have you considered?

- Developing an employability strategy in collaboration with students and employers
- How employability is addressed: through the curriculum, co-curricular activity, extracurricular activities, or all of these
- How you facilitate effective employer engagement
- Promoting extracurricular activities and volunteering opportunities for students to develop skills and experience
- Offering work-based and work-related learning activities including live design briefs, industry competitions, case studies, simulations, role plays, discussions, presentations, workshops and mentoring
- Developing students' enterprise and entrepreneurial skills to support employability
- Embedding education for sustainable development in the curriculum to prepare students for future career challenges in an evolving economy
- Involving alumni and developing alumni case studies and stories to demonstrate the value of employability

Case study

The Edge Hotel School

'Training the trainer' to support students

Review finding (March 2016)

The Edge Hotel School (EHS) received a commendation for the enhancement of student learning opportunities. QAA identified as good practice: 'the strategic approach to the development and implementation of a wide range of initiatives, which informs and enhances the student learning experience' (Quality Code, Enhancement).

About the good practice

EHS offers programmes for the hospitality industry through a partnership with a four-star 40-bedroom commercial hotel, Wivenhoe House. The Hotel provides a practice-based learning environment for students, who experience all aspects of its work and different levels of responsibility, enabling them to develop a professional work ethic.

The management and staff of both EHS and the Hotel have invested considerable time and effort into developing an effective working relationship to deliver a structured and consistent student experience.

Many of the hotel staff initially found it uncomfortable to allow students to step into real

professional roles. A considerable amount of work was required on both sides to achieve buy-in from the staff and managers, particularly with respect to delegating responsibility and especially in areas relating to customer contact or commercial reputation.

In response to this, EHS ran training sessions for the hotel staff to help them understand, and develop confidence in, the students' ability and provide the right level of supervision. The training was intended to give all hotel staff an understanding of the ethos and expectations of higher education at levels four to six, and of how they could contribute effectively to the students' personal development in the course of their hotel duties. The benefits of this 'train the trainer' approach have been numerous. Not only did the hotel staff gain a clearer understanding of student expectations, aspirations and needs, they also had the opportunity to reflect on their own practice. As a result they gained the confidence to encourage greater levels of student engagement and responsibility and to empower student learning and experimentation in a commercial environment.

Evaluation and development

EHS has found the development and training of the hotel staff to be a win-win strategy. Hotel staff are more confident in empowering students to undertake managerial level decisions and responsibilities. Consequently, students develop greater levels of confidence and professionalism to underpin and inform their academic studies. EHS is keeping the initiative under regular review and is happy to be contacted for further information.

Case study

BIMM Ltd

Authentic work-based learning opportunities

Review finding (January 2016)

BIMM Ltd (the British and Irish Modern Music Institute) received a commendation for the quality of student learning opportunities. QAA identified as good practice 'the diversity of work placement opportunities, supported by highly informative guidance in handbooks for staff, students and employers' (Quality Code, *Chapter B10*).

About the good practice

BIMM is the UK's largest provider of music education, with 5,000 students studying at four colleges in Brighton, Bristol, London and Manchester (as well as in Dublin and Berlin). Engagement with the music industry is integral to students' learning - through placements and work-based learning, internships and professional performance. Specific courses, including BA (Hons) in Music Business, Event Management, and Music Journalism, feature formal credit-bearing work-based learning. BIMM also operates artist development sessions and masterclasses, careers tutorials, a UK-wide festival programme and an alumni network. The high number of opportunities is made possible by BIMM's extensive network of industry partnerships and relationships in the cities where it is located. During the 2015-16 academic year, 2,620 students took advantage of these opportunities. As a key example, BIMM students are at the heart of the Brighton Great Escape Festival, either performing or in support roles such as stage manager, sound/lighting technician, venue manager and artist liaison.

Opportunities are governed by policies aligned to UK health and safety and employment legislation and UK Music's Internship Code of Practice, supported by comprehensive employer and student handbooks, produced in consultation with industry partners.

Students are assessed via a portfolio in which they evaluate their experience, reflect on the skills acquired, and set out a career action plan. They provide feedback, and they also receive constructive feedback on their performance from the employer.

Evaluation and development

The annual Graduate Survey is an important tool for evaluating impact and identifying areas for development. In 2014-15, 83 per cent of respondents had taken up industry opportunities and 72 per cent of graduates were working in the music industry six months after graduating. BIMM continually reviews its partnerships to ensure that opportunities are relevant, offer a safe and secure learning environment, and reflect the evolving nature of the music industry. Industry Advisory Panels advise on the skills currently required by employers. Good practice is shared via the termly Creative Collaboration and Industry Liaison Forum. All industry engagements are formally recorded and analysed to inform the Careers and Industry teams on areas for development.

Additional resources and further references

Skills for employability

QAA (2012) Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Education: Guidance for UK Higher Education Providers: www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=70

HEA guidance: www.heacademy.ac.uk/workstreams-research/themes/employability

HEA Student Employability Profiles:
www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/student_employability_profiles_apr07.pdf (PDF, 3MB)

HEFCE (2009) Supporting Higher Education in Further Education Colleges: Policy, Practice and Prospects: www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2009/200905/

Skills for the emerging twenty-first century economy

QAA (2014) Education for Sustainable Development: Guidance for UK Higher Education Providers: www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=533

Drayson, R; Bone, E; Agombar, J; and Kemp, S (2013) Student Attitudes Towards and Skills for Sustainable Development:
www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/student_attitudes_towards_and_skills_for_sustainable_development.pdf (PDF, 1.74MB)

Extracurricular skills

QAA (2013) Recognising Achievement Beyond the Curriculum: A Toolkit for Enhancing Strategy and Practice: www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/Recognising-achievement-beyond-the-curriculum-toolkit-13.pdf (PDF, 389KB)

Assessment

Assessment lies at the heart of the learning experience. How learners are assessed shapes their understanding of the curriculum and determines their ability to progress.

Throughout UK higher education, assessment processes are based on explicit intended learning outcomes, both for programmes and for the elements that constitute them (modules or similar units). The intended learning outcomes set out for the student what they should expect to achieve through the programme and its constituent modules; provide employers and other stakeholders with information about the currency of students' learning.

Assessment is not a linear process but an ongoing cycle through which staff design, set and mark assessment tasks, engage in dialogue about performance, and review and develop assessments ready for the next cohort. Nevertheless, from the students' perspective it does have a linear quality, in that their efforts are focused on doing well in consecutive assessments, leading to a final outcome that will influence their future. Getting assessment right is therefore pivotal to the quality of the student experience.

What do we mean by assessment?

Assessment involves two distinct aspects and is usually subdivided into two categories, often known as formative assessment and summative assessment.

Formative assessment has a developmental purpose and is designed to help learners learn more effectively by giving them feedback on their performance and on how it can be improved and/or maintained. Reflective practice by students sometimes contributes to this.

Summative assessment has a more formal purpose and is used to indicate the extent of a learner's success in meeting the criteria used to gauge the intended learning outcomes. The marks awarded count towards the final mark/classification of the programme or module.

These definitions are not exhaustive. Constructive feedback on work is not provided exclusively through formative assessment, and summative assessment should also be capable of promoting student learning.

Policies, regulations and processes

The process of assessment is a key element in the setting and maintaining of academic standards. While degree-awarding bodies/awarding organisations have ultimate responsibility for the academic standards of their awards, providers are involved in, and accountable for, the effective operation of different aspects of assessment in all its forms. The specific roles of providers are as set out in the written agreement with the degree-awarding body/awarding organisation. Assessment policies, regulations and processes should be clear and accessible to all those who need to make use of them.

The purposes of assessment

In the remainder of this section, unless stated otherwise, the term assessment should be understood as referring to summative assessment, though many of the principles can be applied to formative assessment.

Assessment serves a number of purposes. The main purpose of summative assessment is to measure student learning in a way that recognises it through the award of credits or equivalent (the combination of which can then lead to a named qualification). Academic staff form a judgement as to what extent students have achieved the intended learning outcomes

of a programme, or of an element of a programme.

However, of equal importance is the recognition that assessment should also be an integral part of learning, or that summative as well as formative assessment can, and does, facilitate student learning. The link between assessment and learning is reinforced in *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*, which addresses feedback as part of the learning and teaching process.

The importance of the purpose of assessment may differ according to circumstances.

For the student individual assessments provide a motivation for study, and they promote ongoing learning by providing feedback on performance and helping students to identify their strengths and weaknesses.

For the teaching staff assessment provides an opportunity to evaluate the knowledge, understanding, ability and skills attained by different students. The overall profile of student performance offers useful information for assessing the effectiveness of course content and teaching methods, thereby facilitating improvement.

For the provider assessment generates information upon which decisions as to students' progression and the receipt of awards may be based. The assessment process enables the provider to ensure that appropriate standards are being met, in accordance with nationally agreed frameworks, such as Subject Benchmark Statements and the Qualifications Frameworks. Information generated by assessment, such as mark or grade distributions, forms a valuable tool for quality assurance and enhancement.

Other stakeholders also have an interest in the assessment process. Professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) may use assessment outcomes to award professional accreditation and/or 'fitness to practise' status (see 'Meeting professional requirements' on page 64). Employers use an individual's assessment record as a means of assessing their educational achievements and suitability for employment.

Assessment processes are implemented effectively when all staff involved have the necessary knowledge and skills, and have received appropriate development or training, to fulfil their specific role.

Have you considered?

- How staff new to an assessment role develop the knowledge and skills required
- How you promote understanding of the theory and practice of assessment and its implementation, including the different purposes of formative and summative assessment
- Improving how you evaluate the extent to which learning outcomes have been achieved
- Establishing effective ways to engage with students to enable and promote dialogue about, and reflective use of, feedback
- How you enable staff to learn about new approaches to assessment and devise new methods, as well as the best ways to operate existing methods
- Raising staff awareness of the assessment implications of student diversity, including cultural diversity, differences in learning modes and the need for inclusivity

Assessment in course design

Programme/module teams will be involved in designing, or reviewing the design of, assessments used to test whether the learning outcomes have been achieved.

The need to build an overall assessment strategy into the design of a programme cannot be too strongly emphasised.

Finding the right model

In building assessment into course design, programme teams are likely to find it helpful to refer to the definitive record or specification of the programme, the relevant qualification descriptor (in the Qualifications Frameworks), the relevant Subject Benchmark Statement, and other guidance (including supplementary guidance publications from QAA).

One approach is to consider the following model, setting out three stages of programme/module design.

Stage 1: Decide on the intended learning outcomes. What should the students be able to do on completion of the course, and what underpinning knowledge and understanding will they need in order to do it, that they could not do when they started?

Stage 2: Devise the assessment task(s). If you have written precise learning outcomes this should be relatively straightforward because the assessment task(s) should test whether or not students can satisfactorily demonstrate achievement of the outcomes.

Stage 3: Devise the learning activities necessary (including formative assessment tasks) to enable the students to satisfactorily undertake the assessment task(s).

The likelihood that more than one iteration might occur reflects the need to ensure what is sometimes referred to as 'alignment' between the learning outcomes at programme and at module level; in other words to ensure that the learning outcomes at programme level are actually being addressed through the combination of modules.

Organisational processes are likely to include guidance on course design, which take account of issues relating to assessment and its fit with learning outcomes.

Have you considered?

- How the assessment process enables learners to demonstrate achievement of all the intended learning outcomes
- Whether there are criteria that enable internal and external examiners to distinguish between different categories of achievement
- Whether there can be full confidence in the security and integrity of assessment procedures
- Whether the assessment strategy has an adequate formative function in developing student abilities
- What evidence there is that the standards achieved by learners meet the minimum expectations for the award, as measured against relevant Subject Benchmark Statements and the Qualifications Frameworks

Following organisational procedures and guidance

Organisational procedures are likely to include expectations or guidance on course design, which take account of issues relating to assessment and its fit with the learning outcomes. One approach is the use of a grid through which staff indicate how assessment methods map to the stated learning outcomes. This can be an effective way of demonstrating that the choice of method is appropriate for each outcome being assessed - although it may not demonstrate that it is necessarily the best.

Selecting assessment methods

At the design stage staff consider, and make a choice between, methods of assessment, depending on how much choice is available with provider limits (and PSRB limits if applicable).

There may be restrictions or general principles to bear in mind such as:

- the preference for using more than one assessment method (unless there is a compelling reason to only use one)
- the need to ensure that students have opportunities for formative assessment in a method that is being experienced for the first time in the programme.

The 'traditional' vehicles for the assessment of students' achievement have been essays and examinations, with practical examinations in areas such as the sciences. However, a much greater range of assessment modes is now being employed, as exemplified in the following subsections.

Written examination

A question or set of questions relating to a particular area of study.

Written examinations usually occur at the end of a period of learning and assess whether students have achieved the intended learning outcomes. They may be 'seen' (where students are aware in advance of the question(s) they are expected to answer) or 'unseen' (where the questions are only revealed in the examination itself). In an 'open-book' examination, a student is allowed to use a selection of reference materials.

A written examination may require a range of different responses, including writing essays, writing short answers, solving problems or use of multiple-choice. Written examinations usually (but not always) take place under timed conditions.

Written assignment, including essay

An exercise completed in writing in the student's own time.

This is a written exercise that typically has a deadline attached but which is not carried out under timed conditions. A well-known example is the essay, where students are required to write about a particular topic or answer a question in depth. Other examples include written briefings on particular topics.

Report

A description, summary or other account of an experience or activity

There are many different kinds of report: often students are required to produce a report after participating in a practical activity such as fieldwork, laboratory work, work experience or a placement. Reports typically have a prescribed format and can serve as the culmination of a project.

Dissertation

An extended piece of written work, usually for purposes of summative assessment.

A dissertation is a substantial piece of writing deriving from research that a student has

undertaken. Dissertations are the result of a student's independent work, carried out under the guidance of a supervisor. Subject areas may follow different conventions in relation to what precisely is required.

Portfolio

A compilation of coursework produced in response to specific assessment briefs.

Portfolios of work are a usual component of art and design programmes, and frequently feature as an assessment method in competence-based qualifications. Typically, a portfolio contains a number of pieces of work, usually connected by a topic or theme. Students are usually required to organise their work and perhaps supplement it with reflective accounts in the form of diaries or logs.

Project output

The product of project work, often of a practical nature (excluding report/dissertation). Students may be assessed on the output of a period of project work (see also Report and Dissertation). Examples are diverse and include the staging of a play or other performance, a piece of artwork, a new product or a poster, structured notes, tables of information and associated commentary.

Oral assessment/presentation

A conversation or oral presentation on a given topic.

Examples of oral assessments and presentations might include conversations, discussions, debates, presentations and individual contributions to seminars. This category would also include the viva voce exam, which is typically used by institutions in specific circumstances, such as to clarify assessment decisions or to test the thesis of a doctoral candidate.

Practical skills assessment

Assessment of a student's practical skills or competence.

Practical skills assessment focuses on whether, and/or how well, a student performs a specific practical skill or technique (or competency). Examples include clinical skills, laboratory techniques, identification of or commentary on an artefact, surveying skills, language translation or listening comprehension.

In the performing arts context, a performance can be used to assess the practical skills of individual students (or groups of students). It usually takes place as a 'one-off' live performance viewed by an examiner, though sometimes the examiner may review a recorded performance.

Group critique

A method of receiving feedback from both tutors and peers.

In the visual arts, the group critique is an established method of receiving either formative or summative feedback from both tutors and peers.

Set exercise

Question or task designed to assess the application of knowledge or of analytical, problem-

solving or evaluative skills.

Examples include data interpretation and data analysis exercises, and problem-based or problem-solving exercises.

Closing remarks about assessment methods

The above list is presented as indicative to reflect that approaches to assessment vary according to the subject, mode of delivery and institution, and can change over time. Methods are described in terms of how they are used to assess course-level information rather than being evaluated from a pedagogical perspective.

The amount and timing of assessment

The amount and timing of assessment are important considerations in ensuring fairness. These must be addressed at the design stage and need to be considered both within the individual modules and across the whole programme (taking into account the combination of subjects in a two or three-subject programme). This ensures that students are enabled to bring their best efforts to bear on the assessment tasks and that treatment within and across programmes and disciplines is equitable.

Amount of assessment

The amount of assessment embraces both the number of tasks within the module (and across the programme) and the size of those tasks. Decisions of this kind are significantly influenced by the nature of the discipline, and there may be expectations laid down by the relevant PSRB for externally accredited programmes as well as by your institution (see 'Meeting professional requirements' on page 64). However, the specific intended learning outcomes that are being measured remain central. Not every outcome has to be explicitly assessed in every task, but students should generally have more than one opportunity to demonstrate the achievement of an outcome.

Decisions about the amount of assessment need to take into account the overall workload for the student in the module/programme. A 20-credit module indicates a notional student learning time of 200 hours which includes all teaching activities, any private study, and all aspects of preparing for and completing the assessment tasks. Students will reflect on what they perceive to be the fairness or otherwise of the workload placed on them and will make comparisons across modules and with their peers on programmes in other disciplines.

Timing of assessment

On the timing of assessment tasks, a key factor for students is whether tasks are evenly spread across all their modules, allowing sufficient time to prepare for and complete each one. Timing is also critical in ensuring that students can receive feedback and can act on that feedback. Taking a view across the whole of a year or stage therefore helps in recognising where the pressure points will be, and thinking about how much time there is for students to assimilate learning from lectures, practicals and so on, as well as the relevant reading.

Weighting of assessment tasks

The weighting of assessment tasks has a bearing on the validity of the assessment process: that is, whether student learning is being measured effectively. It affects how the overall performance in the module is judged. For example, if there are two assessment methods employed, should they be weighted 50:50 in terms of the final mark for the module or in

some other proportion? (Is one of more importance than the other, either in terms of the size of the tasks or their significance for measuring learning outcomes?)

Assessments where a pass is mandatory

There is also the question of whether any assessment element must be passed, irrespective of the performance in other elements. For example, there may be certain skills in which you require students to demonstrate competence, without which they would be unable to pass the module. This is common in, but not restricted to, programmes in professional disciplines such as medicine, nursing and teaching.

Meeting professional requirements

In many disciplines, particularly those of a vocational nature such as nursing, engineering or social work, students who successfully complete their degrees will also achieve professional accreditation, by meeting the requirements of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs). The relevant body may require that the assessment process meets certain criteria, for example:

- a certain proportion of a student's credit must come from unseen examinations
- a student must have demonstrated particular professional competences - normally referred to as 'professional standards'
- a limit is placed on students' entitlement to re-sit failed modules.

External examiner involvement in assessment design

An important aspect of the external examiner's role in maintaining standards concerns the setting of assessment tasks. While staff might have been asked to draft some or all of the tasks, these may be scrutinised by the external examiner. The extent to which he or she is involved will have been agreed on their appointment, including which tasks they will be expected to look at.

Language requirements

The vast majority of UK higher education provision is taught and assessed in English. Where this is not the case, certain considerations must be addressed to ensure that academic standards are not put at risk. Any proposal to involve another language in place of English is likely to require early approval by the awarding institution (some actually prohibit it) so that appropriate arrangements can be considered. It is crucial that the teaching staff and external examiners allocated to the programme have expertise in the additional language.

Assessment of work-based/placement learning

When designing valid and reliable assessment for work-based/placement learning it is important to consider the extent to which staff from the placement provider or employer will be involved in making or contributing to assessment decisions. This might involve providing feedback to inform the marking, or actually undertaking marking.

As many placements occur in professional programmes, the relevant professional body will have laid down its own expectations regarding the conduct of, and involvement in, assessment. This is likely to be made explicit through the programme approval/accreditation process. Extensive resources are available on the subject of work-based learning, including the Higher Education Academy's resources.

Feature of good practice

The robust assessment design and approval procedures that use the expertise of both academic and professional staff (Expectation B6).

University College of Estate Management (UCEM)

The assessment production process clearly outlines the timetable and steps to be taken for the approval of assignment briefs and examination papers. Using a standardised template, Module Leaders author assessments in the semester prior to delivery which are then subject to internal verification and to comment by the external examiner with iterative amendments made as required. The final production stage involves the Scrutiny Board checking assessment components and advising on alignment with UCEM assessment policy, module intended learning outcomes and the appropriateness of the assessment type and academic level. This Board comprises academic staff and members of the RAS Team who comment on the proposed assessment task in terms of its accessibility to students studying remotely and across different countries. Managers and academic and support staff met by the review team spoke of the effectiveness and value of the Scrutiny Board and the benefit accruing from the range of staff involved in this process.

Informing students and providing feedback

Helping students understand assessment

To become effective learners, students need to develop 'assessment literacy' - an understanding of, and readiness for, the assessment process. They should be helped to understand:

- the nature and purpose of assessment
- the language of assessment and assessment processes
- the principles of sound assessment
- the relationship between assessment and learning
- the complex nature of professional judgement.

Students are enabled to develop an understanding of the expectations and processes of assessment, and how they can maximise their chances of being able to demonstrate their full potential. There is a focus on explaining, and demonstrating the use of, intended learning outcomes, assessment criteria and feedback. Working with real, meaningful examples, containing useful ideas and content is one way to achieve this. Planning this activity early in programmes assists students with induction and transition into the curriculum. Students should also be clearly informed about assessment safeguards, such as second marking, moderation and external examining.

Have you considered?

- Whether and how students understand the assessment criteria that you use
- Whether students understand the standards required to achieve a particular grade for each criterion or overall
- Discussing the assessment criteria with students before they start a task
- Showing students examples of work and talking about how these would be assessed
- Using previously marked work to show how feedback was used to improve the quality of later submissions
- Asking students to submit a brief evaluation of their work along with their assignments

- Allowing students to assess a piece of work against the criteria, awarding marks, writing feedback and discussing the process

Recognition of prior learning

Students are provided with clear guidance on how their prior learning will be judged through the assessment process before they submit evidence in support of the claim.

Good academic practice

Assessment literacy also incorporates student ability to recognise and apply good academic practice and be clear about the types of activities that constitute unacceptable practice including plagiarism, cheating, collusion and impersonation.

Have you considered?

- Raising awareness of staff about the importance of designing assessments that minimise opportunities for plagiarism and other forms of unacceptable academic practice
- Whether students are properly informed about how they are expected to reference the work of others
- How the provider prevents, identifies, investigates and responds to unacceptable academic practice
- How the provider informs students of the potential consequences of unacceptable academic practice
- How the handling of individual cases takes account of the needs of the students, including those arising from protected characteristics
- Utilising electronic submission and text matching software to help identify plagiarism

Feedback to students

Effective feedback combines information that enables students to understand the strengths and limitations of their past performance and information that enables them to recognise how future performance can be improved.

One of the key elements of the assessment and feedback process is the development of students' assessment literacy through communication between staff and students, which involves discussion of, or explicit reference to, the assessment/grading criteria.

Providers consider the timing and timeliness of feedback to ensure that it is received when there is sufficient time for students to reflect on it and decide how they might improve their performance on the next assessment task.

Different forms of feedback are considered, taking into account the nature and media of assessed work. These might include the return of work with written comments, the provision of oral feedback (either in addition to, or instead of, written feedback), or evaluative discussion on either a one-to-one or a group/cohort basis.

Have you considered?

- Making use of exemplar assignments or model answers to help reinforce feedback and stimulate discussion
- The extent to which feedback focuses on intended learning outcomes
- Involving employers where the work involves work-based or placement activity

- Introducing peer assessment through which students comment on each other's work
- How students involved in assessment through peer-to-peer activities are provided with guidance to help them fulfil their role
- Self-assessment to encourage students to reflect on their work

Feature of good practice

The depth and industry-relevance of assessment feedback to advance student development (Expectation B6).

London International Film School Ltd t/a London Film School

Staff provide students with regular and extensive formative feedback, and students confirm the value of this. They admire the detail and insight staff share with them. Through its staff, the School is in regular contact with the industry, ensuring that programmes remain relevant. Professionals give students extensive, industry-level formative feedback throughout the term, supporting the feedback given by staff. All feedback culminates in end-of-term screenings.

Marking

Having ensured that the assessment strategy for the programme or module has been designed in a way that is rigorous and consistent with provider and/or degree-awarding body/awarding organisation regulations and/or procedures, providers also ensure that marking is carried out in a way that is transparent and fair.

Staff carry out all aspects of assessment, including marking, in a way that ensures the integrity of the assessment process and of the academic standards of each award.

Have you considered?

These key areas of potential risk:

- any circumstance where draft assessment questions/tasks are, or student work is, held or transported off-site (for example where marking takes place off-campus, and where scripts are sent to an external examiner)
- the invigilation of examinations
- confirming the identity of students undertaking assessments (whether in an examination room or online) or submitting work (whether in person, online, or through other means)

A key aspect of fairness is ensuring that marking is consistent, especially where there are a number of examiners involved. Staff involved in marking and moderation are guided on the mechanisms to be used when marking. Guidance might include:

- a marking scale
- marking schemes (often called 'grade descriptors')
- information about:
 - whether anonymous marking is required
 - various forms of second marking
 - the role of the external examiner(s)
 - use of quantitative data
 - administrative procedures for recording and verifying marks.

The marking scale

When marking student work (including formatively assessed work) staff are clear about what marking scale they are expected to use and to ensure that they are clear about how this is interpreted, so that different examiners all work with it in the same way.¹⁴

For the majority of institutions the 0-100 scale is used (some use alternatives such as letter grades). In a number of subjects there is a tradition of not using the full scale. In Mathematics a mark of 90 or even 100 will be achieved, but such a mark is rarely heard of in Law or some other subjects, notably in the Arts and Humanities.

Marking schemes

The nature of any marking scheme or grading criteria will depend on the provider and the tradition within the specific discipline. In some, detailed marking schemes will be appropriate as a way of guiding all examiners. These may take the form of model answers, with the marks awarded for each part of the answer indicated. In others, agreement over what is being sought in each answer may be achieved through test marking of a sample of work by all markers and a discussion based on this.

The challenge for all involved in marking is to reduce the scope for inconsistency when applying the given marking scheme. Processes referred to below, such as second marking, help to reduce such inconsistency, but as far as possible all those involved in using a marking scheme need to have a shared understanding of it.

Anonymous marking

Anonymous marking is marking where the name of the student is not revealed to the person marking his/her work. Its use is widespread but not universally accepted by either staff or students. In particular, there is a tension between the perceived benefits of anonymity and its conflict with the principle of giving personalised feedback. Evidence suggests that students are more likely to take heed of feedback where it is tailored to their individual needs, based on the marker's knowledge of their progress. However, this is less of an issue for summative feedback processes than it is for formative feedback.

For a number of disciplines the nature of the assessment activity makes anonymous marking impractical (in activities involving performance, for example). In some types of work such as dissertations, where the student is working, under supervision, on an individually selected theme, it is difficult to mark anonymously; however this may not be the case in relation to the second marker who may not have been involved with the work prior to submission.

As with any aspect of assessment, the main issue is the need for clarity and consistency, ensuring that exceptions to the relevant assessment policy are justified and that this justification is understood by staff and students alike. The need for clarity also extends to ensuring that staff and students are clear about when, and in what circumstances, anonymity will be removed. For example, this may be necessary to take into account exceptional circumstances. (See also 'Examination boards and assessment panels' on page 70.)

Second marking

This is a second stage of marking, which may be for checking, sampling or moderation purposes. Providers employ different approaches to it, in terms of both what their

¹⁴ There is a strong body of opinion that the use of numbers to judge the achievement of learning outcomes is inappropriate. In particular see: Rust, C (2011) and Yorke, M (2009).

expectations are and precisely how they are implemented. This is an area where practice between disciplines necessarily varies, reflecting differences in the type of assessment task and submission media.

The main possible approaches to second marking are:

- open marking (where the second marker is informed of the first marker's mark before commencing); one form of open marking is check marking (see below)
- closed/blind marking (where the second marker is not informed of the first marker's mark)
- independent/double marking (each examiner makes a separate judgement and in the event of disagreement a resolution is sought)
- check marking (where the second marker determines whether the mark awarded by the first marker is appropriate and confirms it, or questions it if need be).

One factor that may guide the choice of approach to second marking is the volume of student work to be marked. In recent years there has been a significant shift away from the double marking of all student work towards the use of sampling.

New staff or those new to teaching in higher education may find that a higher proportion of their students' work is second marked (compared with the work of colleagues' students). This is because the experience of the marker is a factor that providers take into account in deciding which assessments should be second marked.

Moderation

Moderation is used variously in practice. It is not the same as second marking but essentially refers to the arrangements that providers put in place to ensure consistency of marking, including the proper application of the assessment criteria. This can include rescaling marks based on the consideration of quantitative data, as outlined below, as well as the sampling of scripts by internal and external examiners.

External examining

The role of external examiners has evolved over the past 20 to 30 years, primarily because of the changes in higher education resulting from its so-called 'massification' and diversification (of students and institutions). Rarely do external examiners now act as examiners in the pure sense of marking submitted work; for most institutions the role is now more about moderating through sampling student assessment tasks and output (sometimes referred to as a 'calibrator' role). External examiners comment on the reliability of the assessment process - especially whether assessment criteria have been appropriately applied - and on its fairness.

External examiners will offer an opinion when consulted by the internal examiners in the event of their being unable to agree; however, in this situation the involvement of a third internal marker is often preferred. The final decision in each and every case is explicitly that of the relevant board of examiners, exercising delegated authority from the senior academic committee of the provider (see 'Examination boards and assessment panels' on page 70).

Through sampling assessed work and judging the reliability and appropriateness of the internal marking, the external examiner may reach the view that marking has been unduly harsh or generous. Where this is the case the provider or department should have in place guidance as to what action should be taken. In some cases this may involve considering whether to raise or lower the marks for the entire cohort, or even undertaking some remarking (time limits may often make the latter impractical).

All aspects of the way in which internal examiners engage with the external examiner will have been agreed by the degree-awarding body/awarding organisation at the outset of the external examiner's term of office. Guidance is given on the likely interaction with the external examiner, and staff may have been given an opportunity to meet him or her.

While the degree-awarding body/awarding organisation is responsible for the standards of its awards, external examiners play an important role in objectively ensuring that they are maintained. Their opinions and judgements are significant - persuasive rather than binding, but not to be rejected lightly or without a dialogue taking place.

Using quantitative data to evaluate marking

Statistical information relating to the results of different groups of students (for example within or across modules, including trend data - usually over three years) can assist the process of determining whether marking has been appropriate. Such data might include pass rates and/or average marks, which can be compared between different markers, and between different programme providers (in the case of partnership provision).

Practice varies as to when and how such data are considered. Consideration of the data at or before the board of examiners' meeting facilitates moderation by enabling informed decisions to be made about the current cohort. Increasingly providers are putting in place information systems capable of generating such data quickly.

Careful analysis of data is required. Where the mean mark for a module is higher than might be expected, this does not necessarily mean that the module has been too easy; it could be the result of innovative teaching methods, particularly where students have developed a strong interest in the topic; or it might occur for a number of other reasons. This is where the experience of more senior examiners, and in particular the external examiner, will be significant.

Administrative procedures

Procedures for recording, verifying and adjusting marks are key to the maintenance of standards. Security is of the utmost importance here. It is also desirable to have processes for verifying that marks presented to examination boards are accurate and complete. This verification includes ensuring that all parts of a student's work have been marked, that marks have been correctly transcribed to the front sheet of examination scripts, and so on.

It is therefore important that staff are clear about what the procedures are, and which tasks, such as inputting and checking marks, are their responsibility. It is also important to ensure that staff are clear about the deadlines for each stage of the marking and recording process. Typically, and especially at the end of the academic year and during reassessment periods, timelines for each aspect of the assessment process are very tight and can fail if one stage is not completed when required. For example, a board of examiners cannot make its decisions without a complete set of marks for the module or programme.

Examination boards and assessment panels

Where appropriate, providers establish boards of examiners for their programmes (sometimes known as assessment boards or assessment panels) as the bodies with formal responsibilities for overseeing the assessment process at module, departmental and/or programme/award level and for making decisions about individual students' assessment outcomes. Regulations, policies or processes make explicit among other items the requirements relating to membership, quoracy, recording of decisions, and the exercise of discretion.

In many cases, but certainly not all, boards of examiners operate on a two-tier basis: one tier charged with determining individual module or unit results, the other with progression from one stage or year to another and the overall final result for the named award. Where a single tier applies, it is important to be clear about how decisions about the marks awarded for individual units relate to the overall decision about progression or the final award. Where two tiers are used there may be some variation in how they are formulated. For example, the higher level board (programme/award board) may not have the authority to change decisions about individual marks decided by the first tier/module board.

Have you considered?

- How staff who chair boards of examiner/assessment panels are trained
- Offering training to staff involved in record keeping at board meetings

Additional resources and further references

QAA (2012) Understanding Assessment: Its Role in Safeguarding Academic Standards and Quality in Higher Education: www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/understanding-assessment.pdf (PDF, 229KB)

Rust, C (2011) 'The unscholarly use of numbers in our assessment practices; what will make us change?' International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, 5(1): <http://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/ij-sotl/vol5/iss1/4/>

Yorke, M (2009) 'Honours degree classifications: what we can and cannot tell from the statistics', Quality Matters, QAA

Monitoring and review

The processes of programme monitoring and review provide a formal opportunity for higher education providers to reflect on their academic provision and consider how it may be changed to enhance the student learning experience. Providers recognise the importance of assessing and evaluating the effectiveness, relevance and validity of their programmes alongside the quality of the student experience.

Programme monitoring is a continuous activity that takes place throughout the year. Programme review occurs less frequently, but periodically and to an agreed cycle.

Academic governance

The extent to which roles and authority for programme monitoring and programme review are devolved or delegated to providers by their degree-awarding body/awarding organisation is defined in the agreement between the two bodies depending upon delivery arrangements. However, degree-awarding bodies/awarding organisations are ultimately responsible for academic standards and the quality of any learning opportunities delivered through others on their behalf. Therefore, even in cases where the responsibility for annual monitoring and review activity resides with providers, the degree-awarding bodies/awarding organisations retain overall responsibility for the quality and standards of the awards that they validate for delivery elsewhere.

In general, providers under validation or franchise arrangements produce monitoring reports for their degree-awarding body partners/awarding organisations according to the requirements of their partnership agreements.

The outcomes of the monitoring process feed into a pyramidal structure of committees at programme, department, school and provider level to assure quality and standards. Issues and enhancements can be highlighted at provider level and any resultant action identified and disseminated back down through the committee structure.

Organisational oversight

Monitoring and review processes provide assurance, at a strategic level within the provider, to the degree-awarding bodies/awarding organisations and other relevant external agencies that the provider is managing academic standards robustly and has a clear policy and procedure for enhancing student learning opportunities.

The monitoring and review of programmes ensures that providers continue to make available to students appropriate learning opportunities that enable the intended learning outcomes of the programmes to be achieved. They also evaluate student attainment of academic standards and confirm that the higher education provision continues to align with the provider's mission and strategic priorities.

Programme monitoring and review enable providers to reflect on the learning opportunities students have experienced, the academic standards achieved, and the continuing currency and relevance of the programmes. These processes also enable higher education providers to consider the extent to which each programme's aims - set out during its design, development and approval (Chapter B1: Programme Design, Development and Approval) - have been achieved (Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards). The monitoring and review of programmes also provide opportunities to ensure the student voice has been heard and to respond to feedback from students and from other stakeholders such as employers.

The outcomes of monitoring and review, which may lead the provider to reconsider the design of a programme, are reported to relevant committees, and/or degree-awarding bodies/awarding organisations as appropriate. Providers put in place mechanisms to oversee these processes and identify any overarching themes. They determine whether strategic action is required in any areas and use the outcomes of the processes to inform organisational planning at an operational level.

Changes to programmes

Monitoring and review help identify where changes to enhance a programme may be made and how they may be acted upon. Where potential improvements are identified through programme monitoring and review processes, these are formally recorded and their implementation is monitored through action plans.

Opportunities for change may also be identified more organically, through the ongoing engagement of students and staff. Providers, in accordance with the agreements they have with their degree-awarding bodies/awarding organisations, ensure that there are no unnecessary barriers to making changes to enhance a programme, and that it is possible to introduce enhancements in a timely fashion, to ensure that the academic interests of students are not jeopardised by the change.

Changes implemented as a result of monitoring and review are, in turn, subject to further monitoring and review at the appropriate time, as the ongoing process of quality assurance and enhancement is cyclical.

Changes vary in scale and effect, and providers and their partners clearly define how they distinguish between different types of change, the process and level of authority needed to agree them, and the period of notice required to enact them. This includes a clear definition of the circumstances under which a programme needs to be reconsidered through any stages of the provider's or degree-awarding body's/awarding organisation's programme approval processes (*Chapter B1: Programme Design, Development and Approval*).

Mechanisms are in place that enable providers to consider the cumulative effect of small changes to programmes. Thus they ensure that the criteria for programme design, development and approval are still met and that programmes continue to align with their aims and intended learning outcomes, and with the provider's strategy and mission.

When substantial changes are proposed to the content and/or character of a programme, or any change to the name of the qualification, providers take into account the effect on the student learning experience and take steps to consult all students affected. They consider how the changes may be implemented while maintaining academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities, which may include introducing them on a phased basis if necessary. Students receive sufficient notice of forthcoming changes.

Closing a programme

Providers have an agreed and planned procedure for managing the closure of a programme, which includes protecting the academic interests of all students already enrolled on the programme (including those who may have taken a break from their studies), and those who have applied for admission to it. The quality of the learning experience is safeguarded during the period in which the programme is being withdrawn, enabling current students to continue studying in line with UK expectations and complete the programme, even though there are no new entrants.

Staff engagement with monitoring and review

Higher education providers recognise the wider value, in terms of enhancement, of involving staff in programme monitoring and review, by putting in place opportunities for staff training, support and development. Members of staff who are new to the processes are enabled to work alongside or observe more experienced colleagues to experience how monitoring and review are managed.

Staff who contribute to programme monitoring and programme review are drawn from across the provider, including academic and professional services staff. Where a provider works with other organisations to deliver higher education, relevant staff contribute to monitoring and review.

Providers ensure that all those involved are aware of their responsibilities and are able to fulfil their role effectively. Providers recognise the value and mutual benefit for their own provision of enabling their staff to become involved in programme monitoring and review at other providers.

Student engagement with monitoring and review

Annual monitoring and periodic programme review play an influential role in the quality management of programmes. Many providers have in place policies that include that student representatives sit on quality committees as full members of the panel.

Students are involved in programme monitoring and review in both formal and informal ways. The nature and extent of student involvement in monitoring and review is proportionate to the scale of the process involved. Engagement could include a survey of all students on a module, programme or in a department, with the results feeding into the review, and/or student focus group meetings attended by groups of students at different stages in their programmes.

Students are a primary source of information about the programmes on which they are studying or have studied. Higher education providers actively seek feedback from students about their learning experience on an ongoing basis and at specified points in the academic cycle. Providers take into account views of students at different points of the programme and take steps to engage a range of students, who reflect the diversity of protected characteristics and prior educational experience.

Feedback is collected through a range of different mechanisms. Where students, not directly involved in the programme, have a defined role in the processes of monitoring and review, there is clarity about their responsibilities. Higher education providers take steps to ensure that they take into account the views of the student body, including students with a diversity of protected characteristics. Higher education providers facilitate the contribution of all students involved by ensuring appropriate training and support is provided, determined by the role the student is taking.

External expertise

Higher education providers seek appropriate advice on academic standards, and the quality of learning opportunities, and ensure that there is sufficient independence and objectivity in any decision making.

Providers therefore draw on a range of perspectives to inform the evaluation phase of the review process. They take into account the outcomes of professional body reviews, and they encourage programme teams to seek the views of current and former students, staff from

other academic subjects (where relevant), external examiners (through their reports), employers, placement providers and so on. External experts can advise as to whether programmes delivered are academically coherent, current in terms of the most recent academic, professional and industrial developments and relevant to the needs of employers.

This externality contributes to the transparency of monitoring and review processes and provides a basis for comparability of academic standards across the higher education sector (Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards).

The role of the external examiner in monitoring and review

Degree-awarding bodies/awarding organisations are expected to ensure that an external examiner is appointed for all academic provision leading to a higher education award (Chapter B7: External Examining). This is reinforced through QAA review methods (see 'Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers)' on page 78) where there are clear expectations that higher education providers are making robust use of their external examiners. The external examiner can play an important role in helping the provider (including the programme team) to assure itself that academic standards are being maintained. However, they can also act as a 'critical friend', offering advice through their external perspective on the development of the programme.

External examiners' reports

An important element of the external examiner's role is the provision to the provider of feedback relating both to the standards achieved and to aspects of the quality of provision.

Such feedback will be provided formally through a written report submitted annually to the provider (this could be through the degree-awarding body/awarding organisation), but may also be provided informally to the programme team at the module/programme boards.

The external examiner is not simply employed once at the end of the year. There is likely to be scope for interaction throughout the year, and this should be discussed with the external examiner on or before his/her appointment. Involvement tends to be more direct and extensive in disciplines where assessments are more practical/visual, such as performing arts and fine art, but this does not have to be solely the case. Practice varies between institutions and between disciplines on whether, and to what extent, external examiners meet with students. It may be dependent upon the partnership agreements.

Annual monitoring

Annual monitoring, as an important part of the academic cycle, is a key quality management and enhancement process. It provides organisations with an opportunity to reflect on their current provision (at module, programme, department and provider level); to highlight successes that may be appropriate for wider dissemination; and to consider how the learning and teaching experience for students may be improved. Reflection enables appropriate action to be identified and taken forward. Annual monitoring is therefore evaluative rather than descriptive, evidence-based, and focused on action and enhancement. It generates evidence that standards are being maintained and that the quality of programmes and of the resources that support them is being managed effectively.

Annual monitoring plays a role in:

- considering the continued currency and validity of a programme
- maintaining the academic standards set by the degree-awarding bodies and/or

- organisations
- monitoring student performance against the intended learning outcomes
- monitoring and enhancing how assessment is managed
- evaluating the effectiveness of learning and teaching resources and identifying matters requiring attention
- evaluating the student experience and identifying enhancements
- reviewing the impact of enhancements already being implemented
- identifying, promoting and disseminating good practice.

The aim is to highlight and record areas of provision that have gone well over the previous year and to identify those in which there is a need for improvement. This is a key reason why providers ensure that, as part of the academic cycle, robust information is systematically obtained from students, external examiners and stakeholders. Such information does not necessarily reflect any deficit in quality, but is part of routine quality assurance procedures designed to facilitate enhancement.

Annual monitoring information is systematically considered at a senior level in the provider to identify good practice and opportunities for further improvement, and to inform strategic initiatives that lead to quality enhancement.

Monitoring processes are used systematically and consistently and are capable of being applied to all higher education provision offered. They are evidence-based and transparent.

Evidence comprises qualitative and quantitative information, which may include (but is not limited to):

- recruitment, selection and admissions data
- student progression and achievement data
- feedback from students, NSS and other appropriate survey sources
- information made publicly available or reported to external bodies including PSRBs
- reports from external examiners and external verifiers
- feedback from alumni, staff and employers.

Where possible, data are disaggregated by protected characteristic in order to identify any differential impact on particular groups of students.

Have you considered?

- Taking steps to ensure that committee panels are given an opportunity to receive views and comments directly from students currently taking the programme
- Using a structured method of discussion, asking staff and students to evaluate simultaneously, but separately, the programme in question and then bringing them together to evaluate results and inform further debate
- The role of students in monitoring processes including the materials made available to them including student module evaluation questionnaire analysis, external examiner reports and programme team responses

Feature of good practice

The engagement of staff at all levels in the preparation and consideration of annual monitoring reports (Expectation B8)

BIMM Limited

The annual monitoring reports (AMRs) are detailed and include data on retention, progression and achievement. Student evaluation of modules and external examiners' reports are also considered in the preparation of the report. The cascading model is a

very effective process as it involves a sizeable number of teaching staff and leaders. While experienced staff take ultimate responsibility for producing the reports, there is evidence of support provided to new programme leaders whose reports are checked and feedback is provided. BIMM Limited has put in place annual training for module leaders to ensure that the reports written by them are appropriate and effective.

BIMM Limited provided some good examples of AMRs, for example, one for University of West London. This was regarded as an exemplar by the University for its own practice. The training and support put in place by the college, and the sharing of good practice within and among the four colleges enables staff across colleges to write detailed and comprehensive AMRs.

Periodic programme review

Operating alongside annual monitoring, periodic programme review is a mechanism by which one or more programmes of study are reviewed regarding quality, standards, continuing viability, and relevance to both internal and external needs. The process typically involves experts from other higher education providers.

Programme review, which occurs less frequently than monitoring, albeit on a periodic basis and to an agreed cycle, enables providers to take a holistic and strategic view of a complete portfolio of programmes, with critical advice from a panel of internal and external peers and external subject experts. It may also be the mechanism by which continuing approval of current provision is confirmed.

Depending on their delegated responsibilities, providers may have limited involvement in the periodic review of programmes. However, periodic review plays a central role in the enhancement of learning and teaching, at both departmental and provider level, by facilitating reflection and, where required, taking action on:

- the continuing appropriateness of the overall aims of programmes
- the currency of programme content and the level of student achievement of the programme learning outcomes, with reference to the Quality Code (including the Qualifications Frameworks and any relevant Subject Benchmark Statements)
- the continuing relevance of programmes in relation to the needs of students, the requirements and needs of external stakeholders such as employers, and the strategic direction of the department and of the provider
- the effect of cumulative changes to programmes and of the introduction and withdrawal of programmes during the period covered by the review
- the future enhancement of programmes both individually and collectively
- the effectiveness of quality management and enhancement processes
- areas of good practice, to be identified and disseminated across the provider.

Have you considered?

- The provider's delegated responsibilities in relation to monitoring and review
- How you collate qualitative and quantitative higher education data and how data from different programmes is reviewed to identify overarching or common themes
- How you prepare staff and students for internal programme review
- The difference between programme monitoring and programme review
- Your internal quality review cycle for higher education programmes and how this connects with programme monitoring and programme review
- How students are involved in the programme monitoring and review processes
- How the organisation's programme monitoring and review processes capture, and enable the sharing of, good practice

Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers)

QAA regularly conducts reviews of UK higher education providers to ensure that they are meeting the Expectations set out in the Quality Code. Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) - HER (AP) - is QAA's principal review method for alternative providers.

The aims of Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers)

The overall aim of HER (AP) is to inform students and the wider public as to whether a provider meets the Expectations of the Quality Code. Its report structure mirrors that of the Quality Code, addressing each Expectation in turn.

Scope and coverage

HER (AP) is concerned with:

- programmes of study leading to awards at Levels 4 to 8 of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* and *The Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland* (these frameworks include designated programmes)
- programmes of study leading to awards at levels 4 to 8 of the Regulated Qualifications Framework (see Ofqual register)¹⁵
- programmes that students on a Tier 4 sponsor licence may study
- integrated foundation year programmes which are designed to enable entry to a specified degree programme or programmes on successful completion.¹⁶

All programmes offered by a provider may be in scope of the review whether or not they are eligible for specific course designation or Tier 4 sponsorship. QAA will be able to advise if you are uncertain as to whether programmes are in scope of Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers).

During the HER (AP), higher education providers are required to provide evidence that they are meeting the Quality Code's Expectations. They can do this by demonstrating that their organisational policies and processes for higher education provision and quality assurance are effective.

The evidence base for HER (AP) is a combination of information collected by QAA, information given by the provider including the self-evaluation document, and information provided by students (the student submission).

The role of partnership agreements

For providers without degree-awarding powers, HER (AP) is concerned with the way in which these providers discharge their responsibilities within the context of their agreements with degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding organisations.

Providers without degree-awarding powers work with degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding organisations, such as Pearson, which retain responsibility for the academic standards of the awards granted in their names, and for ensuring that the quality of learning

¹⁵ See: <http://register.ofqual.gov.uk/Qualification>.

¹⁶ In the case of integrated foundation year programmes, it may be necessary to use other external reference points in addition to the Quality Code to set academic standards for the foundation year element. If the foundation year element is free-standing, and does not have a direct relationship with a specified higher education programme, it is not covered by the Quality Code and is out of scope, but may be subject to other regulatory requirements.

opportunities offered is adequate to enable students to achieve the academic standards required for their awards

Some providers may have degree-awarding powers for certain levels of higher education, such as foundation degrees, but not for bachelor's and master's degrees. These providers will be reviewed as degree-awarding bodies for the awards that they make themselves and as non-degree-awarding bodies for the awards for which they operate as partner organisations for other awarding bodies.

The role of degree-awarding bodies and other awarding organisations

The extent to which degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding organisations are involved in the review process is decided between the provider and the degree-awarding bodies and/or organisation. Review teams will be pleased to meet with awarding body/organisation representatives during the review visit and may encourage them to attend particular meetings should they think this would help them understand provider's responsibilities. However, it is up to the provider and degree-awarding bodies and/or organisation to decide if this is necessary, since the focus of HER (AP) is on the delegated responsibilities of the provider under review and not on how its awarding bodies and/or awarding organisation manage their responsibilities.

Providers should keep their awarding bodies or awarding organisation informed of the progress of the review and make any requests for support.

Judgements and reference points

HER (AP) is carried out by peer reviewers, that is, staff and students from other providers. We ask review teams to make judgements on:

- the setting and/or maintenance of academic standards
- the quality of students' learning opportunities
- information about learning opportunities
- the enhancement of students' learning opportunities.

The judgements are made with reference to the 19 Expectations of the Quality Code. They represent the reasonable conclusions that a review team is able to come to within the scope of the review. The basis for the judgement under enhancement is the review team's assessment of whether and how deliberate steps are being taken at provider level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities.

Judgements in the above four areas are expressed as one of the following:

- commended (not applicable to the judgement on standards)
- meets UK expectations
- requires improvement to meet UK expectations or
- does not meet UK expectations.

Review judgements may be differentiated. This means that different judgements may apply, for example, to provision delivered wholly by the provider and that offered through arrangements with other organisations; or to undergraduate and postgraduate levels; or to the provision associated with different degree-awarding bodies or other awarding organisations.

The review team also identifies features of good practice, makes recommendations for

actions to be taken, and affirms actions already in progress. The recommendations include an indication (timescale) reflecting the urgency with which the team thinks each should be addressed. The most urgent have a deadline of one month after publication of the review report. QAA expects providers to observe these deadlines when they develop their action plan after the review.

HER (AP) culminates in the publication of a report containing the judgements, and the key findings. The provider is obliged to produce an action plan in consultation with students, describing how it intends to respond to the findings.

The self-evaluation document

The self-evaluation document is produced by the provider and submitted for the purposes of the review. It has three main functions:

- to give the review team an overview of the provider, including its track record in managing quality and standards, and details of any relationships with degree-awarding bodies or other awarding organisations and of the external reference points (other than the Quality Code) that the provider is required to consider
- to describe to the review team the provider's approach to assuring the academic standards and quality of that provision
- to explain to the review team how the provider knows that their approach is effective in meeting the Expectations of the Quality Code (and other external reference points, where applicable), and how this could be further improved.

The self-evaluation document has both descriptive and evaluative purposes. It details how a reflective and self-critical higher education provider appraises how effectively it manages standards and quality by asking itself the following questions.

- What are we trying to do?
- Why are we doing it?
- How are we doing it?
- Why is that the best way to do it?
- How do we know it works?
- How can we improve it?

The answers to all of these questions must be linked to the Expectations of the Quality Code, against which the provision will be reviewed.

Format

The most useful format for the self-evaluation document is under the four judgement areas: setting and maintaining academic standards; assuring and enhancing academic quality; information about higher education provision, and quality enhancement. The first three have their own Parts of the Quality Code.

Providers should bear in mind it is the 19 Expectations (seven in Part A, one per Chapter in Part B and one in Part C) that form the basis of judgements in each of the four areas (see Annex). Providers should comment on each Expectation separately (where applicable within the context of their agreements with degree-awarding bodies or other awarding organisations).

The Expectations express the key principles that the higher education community has identified as essential for the assurance of academic standards and quality. They make clear what UK higher education providers are required to do, what they expect of themselves and

each other, and what students and the general public can therefore expect of them.

Providers are judged against how well they have demonstrated that they meet each Expectation. They are not judged against the Indicators of sound practice.

A convenient summary of each Expectation, and the introductory text that supports it, can be obtained from the QAA website where there is a feature called Build Your Own Quality Code.¹⁷

The Indicators of sound practice, while useful in stimulating reflection, should not be the starting point for writing the self-evaluation.

Composition and content

The starting point for writing the self-evaluation is to consider the relevant Expectation. Providers refer to the introductory paragraphs of each Chapter to facilitate understanding of the Expectation.

Example

Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education

The Expectation is as follows.

Recruitment, selection and admission policies and procedures adhere to the principles of fair admission. They are transparent, reliable, valid, inclusive and underpinned by appropriate organisational structures and processes. They support higher education providers in the selection of students who are able to complete their programme.

The Expectation incorporates the principles of fair admission or 'Schwarz principles' first set in Fair Admissions to Higher Education: Recommendations for Good Practice (2004) (the Schwartz Report). The principles are embedded in the Expectation and are fundamental to the Chapter as a whole. The principles are that a fair admissions system should:

- be transparent
- reliably identify applicants' potential
- use reliable and valid assessment methods
- minimise barriers for applicants
- be professional and underpinned by appropriate structures and processes.

Features of a fair admissions system to be demonstrated

Transparency

Admissions policies and procedures in place are clear and explicit and cover everything from initial enquiries through to formal application. The policy makes it clear whether additional assessments, for example in the form of interviews, auditions, tests, the submission of portfolios and so on form part of the application process, how they will be used, and how the outcomes feed into the selection process. Admissions policies include details about how the decision making process works, and the timescales for decisions. Clear information is available about how to appeal against decisions or complain about any stage of the process. The provider makes it clear what fees cover and whether there are likely to be additional charges.

¹⁷ Build Your Own Quality Code, available at:
www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/build-your-own-quality-code-intro.

Identifying potential

Providers are expected to identify and select applicants who are likely to be able to complete the programme, based on their achievements and a judgement of their potential. Providers ensure that all staff (including those working outside the organisation, nationally or internationally) who engage with applicants and/or the application process have sufficient experience, have up-to-date knowledge, and are appropriately trained to carry out their respective roles in a professional manner.

Use of reliable and valid assessment methods

Providers are expected to use assessment methods that are reliable and valid. Beyond standard entry requirements, clear and transparent policies are needed for the recognition of prior learning and to ensure that entry requirements are met.

Minimising barriers

Providers make admissions policies, which should be available on request in different formats, clear and accessible to external audiences through their website. Providers regularly review their application materials and processes to ensure they remain fit for purpose, that they do not unduly discriminate against any potential applicant groups and that any supporting information, advice and guidance required to complete a suitable application is reasonably accessible.

Professionalism and organisational structures to be demonstrated

The Expectation also sets out that appropriate organisational structures and processes underpin the principles.

Providers' admissions processes and procedures are expected to be professional in every respect and underpinned by appropriate organisational structures and processes. They need to be applicable to all modes and levels of study, support staff professionalism and coherent practice across the provider, and facilitate measuring and monitoring. They set out rules and regulations to which all staff involved in the application process adhere. They should be familiar to staff involved in recruitment, selection and admission, who should be fully briefed on the requirements of their role (this includes administrative as well as academic staff).

The introductory paragraph of the Chapter sets its scope and describes the activities that providers undertake to put in place appropriate organisational structures and processes. For *Chapter B2*, this includes:

- recruitment activities that help prospective students make informed decisions
- policies and procedures that ensure the selection of suitably qualified applicants
- employ effective decision-making processes and communication methods
- support successful applicants in their transition to higher education.

Recruitment activities to inform students' choices

These activities help prospective students ascertain whether they wish to undertake study within higher education and, if so, where, how and what they might wish to study.

These 'activities' include all the information and events that prospective students can access to inform their decisions, along with a clear and transparent application process, including information found on the provider websites, the prospectus, promotional materials, programme pages, programme specification, open days, taster days and so on.

Policies and procedures to select suitably qualified applicants

These could include the rules and regulations that govern recruitment, selection and admission and to which staff adhere, the entry criteria and any staff training that enable staff to select suitable qualified applicants.

Decision-making processes and subsequent communication with applicants

Applicants are entitled to timely communications regarding the provider's decision as to whether or not they have been successful. They should have access to an admissions appeals and complaints policy supported by a process that is easy to follow.

Supporting transition to higher education

Successful applicants are prepared in advance for the academic environment. Student expectations can be managed in a number of ways, from recruitment events to pre-arrival support material, and summer schools. Social media are becoming increasingly useful in this regard too.

How do the Indicators of sound practice help?

Expectations are the starting point for writing the self-evaluation document. In Chapter B2 the principles follow the prospective student life cycle. This is reflected in the Indicators of sound practice, which may stimulate reflection on policies and processes, but are not mandatory.

In Chapter B2, the Indicators are organised under two headings. The first cluster describes an effective basis for recruitment, selection and admission and addresses the process as a whole; each indicator is applicable at every stage throughout the recruitment, selection and admission process. The second cluster deals with each stage of the process and follows the prospective student life cycle of: considering higher education, applying, going through the selection process, receiving the decision/feedback, and making the transition into higher education.

How is the self-evaluation document used?

The self-evaluation document is used throughout the review process. During the desk-based analysis it is part of the information base that helps to determine the duration of the review visit.

The reviewers will be looking for indications that:

- the provider systematically monitors and reflects on the effectiveness of its engagement with the Quality Code
- monitoring and self-reflection use management information and comparisons against previous performance and national and international benchmarks, where available and applicable, which may include the National Student Survey, the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education survey, and data on non-continuation following year of entry, or retention rates¹⁸
- monitoring and self-reflection is inclusive of student feedback (and feedback from third parties where relevant)
- monitoring and self-reflection leads to the identification of strengths and areas for

¹⁸ Derived from table series T3 of the Performance Indicators for Higher Education in the UK, published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency: www.hesa.ac.uk.

improvement, and subsequently to changes in procedures and practices.

Additional resources and further references

Supplementary guidance on writing the self-evaluation document for Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers): www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/Supplementary-guidance-on-writing-the-self-evaluation-document-for-HER-Alternative-Providers.pdf (PDF, 188KB)

This should be read in conjunction with Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) Handbook and particularly Annex 3 of that handbook, which describes the role of the self-evaluation document, how it is used during review, what it should cover, and how it ought to be structured: www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication/?PubID=3174.

Student involvement

Students are among the main beneficiaries of HER (AP) and are at the heart of the review process. In every review there are many opportunities for students to inform and contribute to the review team's activities.

Membership of the review team

Review teams of three or more normally include a student reviewer as a full member of the team. Student reviewers are a key element in our aim to involve students more in quality assurance processes. Student reviewers ensure that the student experience is at the heart of the review process, as well as contributing to the team spirit and the general operation of the process. Further information about student reviewers is available on the website.¹⁹

The student submission

For providers going through a QAA review, the student submission is an opportunity for students to give the review team an impression of what it is like to study at that institution.

It also expresses how students' views are incorporated into the decision making and quality assurance processes of the provider. The student submission is a key document to be considered during the review process.

The student submission is often a written document although it can be in alternative formats. It uses students' opinions, surveys and other feedback to discuss students' views on certain key areas, which are all detailed in the guidance below.

The lead student representative

Wherever possible there should be a lead student representative (LSR). This role places a student representative at the heart of the review process. The LSR might be:

- an officer from the students' union
- an appropriate member of a similar student representative body
- a student drawn from the provider's established procedures for course representation.

Where there is no student representative body the provider could ask for volunteers from

¹⁹ Student reviewers: www.qaa.ac.uk/partners/students/our-review-methods/student-reviewers.

within the student body to fill this role. The LSR role could be subject to a job-share or team effort, as long as it was clear who was the point of communication. Although a senior member of staff cannot be the LSR it is possible under some circumstances for students holding staffing positions to be the LSR, for example a postgraduate student who is engaged in small amounts of teaching.

The LSR is invited to a briefing event to enable them to:

- understand how HER (AP) operates
- understand their own role
- discuss and be fully aware of the review timeline and what they are required to do and when
- put their questions to QAA.

Providers are expected to provide as much operational and logistical support to the LSR as is feasible, and, in particular, to ensure that any relevant information is shared with the LSR so that the student submission is well informed and evidence based.

The LSR would normally be responsible for:

- receiving copies of key correspondence from QAA
- organising or overseeing the development of the student submission
- helping the review team to select students to meet
- advising the review team during the review visit, on request
- attending the final review meeting
- liaising internally with the facilitator to ensure smooth communication between the student body and the provider
- disseminating information about the review to the student body
- coordinating the students' comments on the draft review report
- coordinating the students' input into the provider's action plan.

Have you considered?

- Giving the LSR access to the evidence supporting the self-evaluation document
- Sharing the self-evaluation document with the LSR
- Copying the LSR into all correspondence with QAA
- Allowing the LSR timetable access so that focus groups can be set up
- Ensuring staff buy into the process and the role of the LSR?

Guidance for students preparing a student submission

Guidance on alternative student submissions in QAA reviews:

www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/Guidance-on-alternative-student-submissions-in-QAA-reviews-2017.pdf (PDF, 17KB)

Optional template for student submissions in QAA reviews:

www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/Optional-template-for-student-submissions-in-QAA-reviews-2017.docx (DOC, 47KB)

What happens after the review visit?

Publication of reports and action plans

HER (AP) culminates in the publication of a report, which sets out the review's findings (judgements, features of good practice, recommendations, and affirmations). Reports are published on QAA's public website and provide a rich understanding of today's diverse and differentiated higher education sector. Each review report offers both the individual provider and the higher education sector in general the opportunity to learn from the outcomes.

After the report has been published providers publish an action plan responding to the recommendations and affirmations and giving any plans to capitalise on the identified good practice. This is the provider's public commitment to take forward the outcomes of the review, and to enhance the student learning experience while disseminating good practice. This should be produced jointly with student representatives, or representatives should be able to post their own commentary on the action plan. Providers are expected to update their action plan on an annual basis, again in conjunction with student representatives, until all actions have been completed. The updated plan should be posted to the provider's website.

How good practice is shared through review

Knowledgebases

The features of good practice, recommendations and affirmations identified through QAA reviews of higher education institutions and further education providers feed into three [Knowledgebases](#).²⁰

These can be searched by selecting any or all three Knowledgebases: Good Practice; Recommendations; Affirmations; and applying filters to the search that includes: publication date; one of six themes, which include working with employers, equality and diversity, enhancement, staff development, postgraduate experience and internationalisation; chapters of the Quality Code; or by using a key word search.

Good practice identified through methods that operated prior to 2014 are categorised where appropriate by themes relating to the learner journey. Providers can also choose to include the results of Welsh reviews as part of their search.

Good practice case studies

QAA also publishes [good practice case studies](#) identified QAA through review of higher education providers. A number of the good practice case studies relating to alternative providers have been included in this toolkit.

Key findings reports

The QAA, on a periodic basis, also publishes reports summarising the key findings and judgements of reviews.

²⁰ QAA Knowledgebases and good practice case studies: www.qaa.ac.uk/improving-higher-education/knowledgebase-search.

Annex: The Parts, Chapters and 19 Expectations

Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards

Chapter A1: UK and European Reference Points for Academic Standards

Expectation A1

In order to secure threshold academic standards, degree-awarding bodies:

- ensure that the requirements of The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland/The Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland are met by:
 - positioning their qualifications at the appropriate level of the relevant framework for higher education qualifications
 - ensuring that programme learning outcomes align with the relevant qualification descriptor in the relevant framework for higher education qualifications
 - naming qualifications in accordance with the titling conventions specified in the frameworks for higher education qualifications
 - awarding qualifications to mark the achievement of positively defined programme learning outcomes
- consider and take account of QAA's guidance on qualification characteristics
- where they award UK credit, assign credit values and design programmes that align with the specifications of the relevant national credit framework.
- consider and take account of relevant subject benchmark statements.

Chapter A2: Degree-Awarding Bodies' Reference Points for Academic Standards

Expectation A2.1

In order to secure their academic standards, degree-awarding bodies establish transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations to govern how they award academic credit and qualifications.

Expectation A2.2

Degree-awarding bodies maintain a definitive record of each programme and qualification that they approve (and of subsequent changes to it) which constitutes the reference point for delivery and assessment of the programme, its monitoring and review, and for the provision of records of study to students and alumni.

Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards

Expectation A3.1

Degree-awarding bodies establish and consistently implement processes for the approval of taught programmes and research degrees that ensure that academic standards are set at a level which meets the UK threshold standard for the qualification and are in accordance with their own academic frameworks and regulations.

Expectation A3.2

Degree-awarding bodies ensure that credit and qualifications are awarded only where:

- the achievement of relevant learning outcomes (module learning outcomes in the case of credit, and programme outcomes in the case of qualifications) has been demonstrated through assessment
- both the UK threshold standards and the academic standards of the relevant

degree-awarding body have been satisfied.

Expectation A3.3

Degree-awarding bodies ensure that processes for the monitoring and review of programmes are implemented which explicitly address whether the UK threshold academic standards are achieved and whether the academic standards required by the individual degree-awarding body are being maintained.

Expectation A3.4

In order to be transparent and publicly accountable, degree-awarding bodies use external and independent expertise at key stages of setting and maintaining academic standards to advise on whether

- UK threshold academic standards are set, delivered and achieved
- the academic standards of the degree-awarding body are appropriately set and maintained.

Part B: Assuring and Enhancing Academic Quality

Chapter B1: Programme Design, Development and Approval

Expectation B1

Higher education providers, in discharging their responsibilities for setting and maintaining academic standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, operate effective processes for the design, development and approval of programmes.

Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education

Expectation B2

Recruitment, selection, and admission policies and procedures adhere to the principles of fair admission. They are transparent, reliable, valid, inclusive and underpinned by appropriate organisational structures and processes. They support higher education providers in the selection of students who are able to complete their programme.

Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching

Expectation B3

Higher education providers, working with their staff, students and other stakeholders, articulate and systematically review and enhance the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices, so that every student is enabled to develop as an independent learner, study their chosen subject(s) in depth and enhance their capacity for analytical, critical and creative thinking.

Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement

Expectation B4

Higher education providers have in place, monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential.

Chapter B5: Student Engagement

Expectation B5

Higher education providers take deliberate steps to engage all students, individually and collectively, as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience.

Chapter B6: Assessment of Students and the Recognition of Prior Learning

Expectation B6

Higher education providers operate equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment, including for the recognition of prior learning, which enable every student to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the credit or qualification being sought.

Chapter B7: External Examining

Expectation B7

Higher education providers make scrupulous use of external examiners.

Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review

Expectation B8

Higher education providers, in discharging their responsibilities for setting and maintaining academic standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, operate effective, regular and systematic processes for monitoring and for review of programmes.

Chapter B9: Academic Appeals and Student Complaints

Expectation B9

Higher education providers have procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints about the quality of learning opportunities; these procedures are fair, accessible and timely, and enable enhancement.

Chapter B10: Managing Higher Education Provision with Others

Expectation B10

Degree-awarding bodies take ultimate responsibility for academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities, irrespective of where these are delivered or who provides them. Arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with organisations other than the degree-awarding body are implemented securely and managed effectively.

Chapter B11: Research Degrees

Expectation B11

Research degrees are awarded in a research environment that provides secure academic standards for doing research and learning about research approaches, methods, procedures and protocols. This environment offers students quality of opportunities and the support they need to achieve successful academic, personal and professional outcomes from their research degrees.

Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

Expectation C

Higher education providers produce information for their intended audiences about the learning opportunities they offer that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

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