



The UK Quality Code for Higher Education

May 2023

This publication is available in English and Welsh.

About this edition

This edition of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) has been produced in May 2023 to ensure the introductory text it contains accurately reflects the current regulatory position of the Quality Code.

The text of the Quality Code itself (the Expectations and the Core and Common practices) has not been changed since it was published in 2018.

At the time of writing, the UK higher education sector is engaged in discussing what the scope and structure should be for the next edition of the Quality Code in order for it to continue being of value to students and staff across the UK.

UKSCQA and QAA

The [UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment \(UKSCQA\)](#) oversees those higher education quality assessment arrangements that continue to be shared across the UK.

The Committee has members drawn from publicly funded universities and colleges, and from providers designated for student support by the Secretary of State in England. Student interests are represented by both the National Union of Students and individual student members. Membership is also drawn from the four UK higher education funding bodies and regulators, sector bodies and regulatory partners. The Quality Code was developed on behalf of UKSCQA in 2018. It represents expectations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The OfS consulted on new requirements which were introduced in May 2022. In England, the OfS's Conditions of Registration supersede the Quality Code as regulatory requirements.

The [Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education \(QAA\)](#) is the UK's independent, expert higher education quality body. Among other things, QAA is custodian, on behalf of the sector, of a range of reference points including the Quality Code.

The UK Quality Code for Higher Education

The Quality Code embodies a shared understanding across UK higher education for quality practice. It protects the public and student interest, and champions UK higher education's world-leading reputation for quality. The Quality Code is sector-led, future-facing and accessible to the full breadth of our diverse UK higher education sector.

The Quality Code articulates fundamental principles for higher education quality across the UK. These include emphasising the role of providers in assuring the quality of the experience they offer to students, supporting student engagement, and ensuring external referencing is used to support the integrity of awards and the quality of provision.

It embodies the cooperative approach that underpins UK higher education. The expertise of the sector was invaluable in drafting the Expectations, practices and Advice and Guidance themes which help contextualise the Quality Code in practice.

Structure

The Quality Code is based on two elements that together provide a reference point for effective quality assurance:

1. **Expectations** which succinctly express the outcomes providers should achieve in setting and maintaining the standards of their awards, and for managing the quality of their provision.
2. **Core and Common practices** which represent effective ways of working that underpin the delivery of the Expectations and will deliver positive outcomes for students. Core and Common practices remain part of the quality frameworks in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland but in England institutions need to comply with the [Office for Students regulatory framework](#) and Conditions of Registration. While the Quality Code does not represent regulatory requirements for institutions based in England, those providers can choose to use the Code to satisfy themselves that their quality processes support enhancement above the baseline.

To support the implementation of the Expectations and Core and Common practices, there is a suite of [Advice and Guidance themes](#) which helps established and new providers to develop, maintain and enhance effective quality assurance practices. These themes are not a formal part of the Quality Code.

How the Quality Code is used

The Quality Code is recognised across the UK higher education sector as a key reference point which offers providers a quality framework on which to build a high-quality student experience, that supports students through well-designed courses to achieve the qualifications that will help them to fulfil their longer-term career aspirations.

Providers are able to use the Quality Code in line with their educational mission, national quality arrangements and regulatory requirements. Higher education students and their representatives are encouraged to use the Code as a starting point for engaging with their provider on the quality of their education, and the extent to which the expected outcomes have been achieved.

As higher education is the responsibility of devolved administrations, the precise national arrangements for quality differ including how parts of the Quality Code will be used in external oversight and review.

National funders and regulators in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, in collaboration with QAA, use the Quality Code as a basis for assessing the quality of higher education provision in line with their statutory responsibilities. In England, the Code has no equivalent regulatory status and providers use it on a voluntary basis to enhance their practice. Providers in England will need to refer to the Office for Students' Regulatory Framework for detail on their regulatory quality requirements.

The UK Quality Code

Expectations for standards		Expectations for quality	
<p>The academic standards of courses meet the requirements of the relevant national qualifications framework.</p> <p>The value of qualifications awarded to students at the point of qualification and over time is in line with sector-recognised standards.</p>		<p>Courses are well-designed, provide a high-quality academic experience for all students and enable a student's achievement to be reliably assessed.</p> <p>From admission through to completion, all students are provided with the support that they need to succeed in and benefit from higher education.</p>	
<p>Core practices</p> <p>The provider ensures that the threshold standards for its qualifications are consistent with the relevant national qualifications frameworks.</p> <p>The provider ensures that students who are awarded qualifications have the opportunity to achieve standards beyond the threshold level that are reasonably comparable with those achieved in other UK providers.</p> <p>Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the standards of its awards are credible and secure irrespective of where or how courses are delivered or who delivers them.</p> <p>The provider uses external expertise, assessment and classification processes that are reliable, fair and transparent.</p>	<p>Common practices</p> <p>The provider reviews its Core practices for standards regularly and uses the outcomes to drive improvement and enhancement.</p>	<p>Core practices</p> <p>The provider has a reliable, fair and inclusive admissions system.</p> <p>The provider designs and/or delivers high-quality courses.</p> <p>The provider has sufficient appropriately qualified and skilled staff to deliver a high-quality academic experience.</p> <p>The provider has sufficient and appropriate facilities, learning resources and student support services to deliver a high-quality academic experience.</p> <p>The provider actively engages students, individually and collectively, in the quality of their educational experience.</p> <p>The provider has fair and transparent procedures for handling complaints and appeals which are accessible to all students.</p> <p>Where the provider offers research degrees, it delivers these in appropriate and supportive research environments.</p> <p>Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the academic experience is high-quality irrespective of where or how courses are delivered and who delivers them.</p> <p>The provider supports all students to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes.</p>	<p>Common practices</p> <p>The provider reviews its Core practices for quality regularly and uses the outcomes to drive improvement and enhancement.</p> <p>The provider's approach to managing quality takes account of external expertise.</p> <p>The provider engages students individually and collectively in the development, assurance and enhancement of the quality of their educational experience.</p>

Glossary

The terms below are defined for the purpose and in the context of quality assurance in UK higher education, and the definitions provided apply throughout the Quality Code. Further information to support the definitions provided will be made available in the [Advice and Guidance themes](#) that underpin the Code. Please note that the terms below may be defined differently in other contexts (within and beyond HE) and by different stakeholders (regulators, students, individual providers, for example).

All students - all students irrespective of background or any protected characteristics, studying at any level and by any mode (for example, undergraduate and postgraduate; full-time and part-time; distance, work-based and on-campus learners; HE apprentices).

Academic experience - the students' experience of studying on their course, and their experience of any other resources, support, facilities and opportunities that the provider makes available to support students' learning.

Enhancement - the process by which higher education providers systematically improve the quality of provision and the ways in which students' learning is supported.

High quality - quality which can consistently lead to credible and recognised positive outcomes for students. High quality is the minimum level of quality that is expected of all providers of UK HE.

Over time - refers to the need for the achievements represented by a qualification to be comparable with those of previous and future graduates with the same qualification.

Partnership - all arrangements where a provider works with others to design and/or deliver courses and/or to award qualifications. These can include validation and subcontracting (or franchising) arrangements, work-based learning arrangements and collaboration with employers (including to deliver apprenticeships), transnational education (TNE) arrangements, and international partnerships and collaborations. The processes that providers will need to follow in order to assure high quality will vary considerably depending on the type of partnership concerned, and the risks involved.

Value - the credibility and standing of qualifications, and their reliability as a reflection and consistent record of academic achievement.

First published - 3 May 2018

Updated - 10 May 2023

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786
www.qaa.ac.uk