



The Quality Code

A Brief Guide

The UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) is used to assure the standards and quality of UK higher education.

It is owned, maintained and published by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) and has been developed in consultation with the higher education sector.

Individual higher education providers use the Quality Code to ensure students have a high quality educational experience. It consists of a series of separate Chapters grouped in three Parts.

www.qaa.ac.uk/qualitycode

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.

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 refers to 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.

Who is responsible for academic standards and quality?

Individual universities and other organisations that are legally entitled to award degrees are ultimately responsible for the academic standards and quality of higher education programmes leading to their qualifications. These degree-awarding bodies are independent and self-governing. They remain responsible for their qualifications regardless of where a programme is delivered or who provides it on their behalf.

What are higher education providers?

Universities and colleges, whatever their source of funding, and other organisations involved in the delivery of UK higher education programmes, are known collectively as higher education providers.

Who publishes the Quality Code?

The Quality Code is owned and maintained by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. QAA's mission is to safeguard academic standards and improve the quality of UK higher education wherever it is delivered around the world. We support higher education providers in meeting their responsibilities for academic standards and quality, and check that they are doing so by conducting reviews. The Quality Code is the primary resource for these activities. We also publish other guidance to promote a better quality experience for students.



What are the key features of the Quality Code?

The Quality Code sets out the formal Expectations that all UK higher education providers reviewed by QAA are required to meet. It is the nationally agreed, definitive point of reference for all those who deliver or support UK higher education programmes.

Why is the Quality Code important?

The Quality Code gives individual higher education providers a shared starting point for:

- **setting and maintaining the academic standards of their higher education programmes and awards**
- **assuring the quality of the learning opportunities they provide for students.**

This makes it possible to ensure that higher education provision and learning outcomes are comparable and consistent at a threshold level across the UK.

The purpose of the Quality Code is to:

- **safeguard the academic standards of UK higher education**
- **assure the academic quality of learning opportunities that UK higher education offers**
- **promote continuous and systematic improvement in UK higher education**
- **ensure that information about UK higher education is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.**

How is the Quality Code used?

Higher education providers use the Quality Code 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.

Student representatives and students' unions can use the Quality Code in their discussions with their higher education provider, as it sets out the minimum expectations for academic standards and the quality of the learning opportunities and information the provider makes available to its students.

QAA reviewers use the Quality Code as a benchmark for judging whether a higher education provider meets UK expectations for academic standards, the quality of learning opportunities, improvement or 'enhancement', and information.



What are the key values of the Quality Code?

- 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 clearly explained 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.

What does the Quality Code contain?

The Quality Code has a General Introduction which explains its purpose and nature. The main body of the Quality Code consists of three Parts (A, B and C) which address academic standards, academic quality, and information respectively.

General Introduction

This document provides a technical introduction for users of the Quality Code.



Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards

Part A consists of three Chapters which describe the various aspects of how academic standards are set and maintained for higher education qualifications awarded by UK degree-awarding bodies.

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.



Part B: Assuring and Enhancing Academic Quality

Part B consists of 11 Chapters which look at a distinct aspects of academic quality.

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

Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

Part C is shorter and is not subdivided. It addresses how providers produce information that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

PART
C

What are Expectations?

Expectations express key matters of principle that the higher education sector has identified as essential. 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 providers.

Part A contains seven Expectations. Each of the 11 Chapters of Part B contains a single Expectation, as does Part C.

Individual providers should be able to demonstrate that they are meeting the relevant Expectations effectively, through their own management and organisational processes, taking account of the unique needs, traditions, culture and decision-making processes of their organisation.

What are Indicators of sound practice?

Indicators of sound practice help higher education providers reflect on how they might meet the relevant Expectations. They describe actions or approaches that providers have agreed illustrate sound practice.

What is explanatory text?

Each Expectation in Part A and each Indicator in Parts B and C is accompanied by explanatory text which explains why it is important and describes a range of ways in which the Expectation or Indicator might be addressed and demonstrated.

How has the Quality Code been developed?

The Quality Code has been developed in consultation with the UK higher education sector and is owned, maintained and published by QAA. QAA works with the sector to ensure that the Quality Code remains up to date, through an ongoing process of review and revision.

What doesn't it cover?

The Quality Code relates to the learning and teaching activities of higher education providers, including research degrees. Among the areas it does not cover are other forms of research activity and non-academic provision such as accommodation and estates management.

What if I'm concerned about the quality of a programme?

If you are a student you may find it helpful to discuss the matter with your student representative body, such as a students' union, if there is one. Your university or college will have an internal complaints process which you should follow. If you remain dissatisfied having completed all stages of the internal process, you may be able to take the matter to an external complaints body. In England and Wales this is the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (www.oiahe.org.uk), and in Scotland it is the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (www.scottishombudsman.org.uk). In Northern Ireland the universities each have a Board of Visitors, details of which can be obtained from the relevant university.

If you are a member of staff you may find it helpful to discuss the matter with the quality assurance office. There will also be an internal complaints procedure for staff.

If you are a member of the public you should contact the relevant university or college to raise your concern.

Whether you are a student, member of staff or member of the public, if you believe that your concern relates to a serious systemic failing in the way a higher education provider manages the standards or quality of its higher education provision, you may be able to raise the matter through QAA's Concerns Scheme: www.qaa.ac.uk/complaints/concerns.

Find out more about the Quality Code

The Quality Code is available on the QAA website along with guidance, good practice and other resources. If you have any questions you can talk to your students' union, your university or college's quality assurance office, or contact QAA.

www.qaa.ac.uk/qualitycode

Contact us



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QAA 1110 - February 2015

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Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786