

A guidance note on the application of *Part A: Setting and maintaining academic standards* to higher education providers without degree awarding powers

This guidance about *Part A: Setting and maintaining academic standards* of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) is intended to clarify what providers should comment on in their self-evaluations. It is of particular relevance to providers who do not have degree-awarding powers.

Part A has 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

These Chapters contain seven expectations which higher education providers are required to meet to ensure that academic standards are set and maintained.

Expectation A1

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

- a) 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
- b) consider and take account of QAA's guidance on qualification characteristics
- c) where they award UK credit, assign credit values and design programmes that align with the specifications of the relevant national credit framework.
- d) consider and take account of relevant subject benchmark statements.

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.

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.

Responsibilities of non degree-awarding bodies

Degree-awarding bodies often work with other providers (delivery organisations or support providers) that do not have degree awarding powers to deliver provision which leads to the award of a higher education qualification or academic credit of the degree-awarding body. Where this happens, degree-awarding bodies are responsible for setting the academic standards and are responsible for maintaining those academic standards regardless of where the learning opportunities are delivered or who provides them. Delivery organisations that work with degree-awarding bodies are responsible for delivering modules or programmes of study and maintaining the academic standards of the degree-awarding body. The operational implementation of certain functions related to academic standards (for example, assessment) may be delegated to these delivery organisations which are then

accountable to the degree-awarding body for discharging them appropriately and for operating in accordance with the academic frameworks and regulations approved by the relevant degree-awarding body (see *Chapter A2* and *Chapter A3*). In some instances, the degree-awarding body may have approved separate academic frameworks and/or regulations for an individual delivery organisation. In these circumstances, the delivery organisation is responsible for contributing to the review of regulations and recommending changes for approval by the degree-awarding body.

A degree-awarding body's responsibility for the academic standards of all credit and qualifications awarded in its name is never delegated. Degree-awarding bodies are responsible for defining and recording, in a written agreement for each specific arrangement, the specific functions delegated to a delivery organisation and the individual and shared roles, responsibilities and obligations of each party. See *Chapter B10: Managing higher education provision with others*. All delivery organisations or support providers that work with a degree-awarding body are required to engage with the Quality Code and to meet the relevant expectations.

Questions for non degree-awarding providers

This extract from *Part A: Setting and maintaining academic standards* prompts a series of questions which non degree-awarding bodies could use to reflect on their responsibilities for helping to set and maintain academic standards.

- Which degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding bodies are you working with?
- Which modules or programmes of study are you delivering for each of these?
- What is your understanding of the responsibilities you have been allocated by each degree-awarding body and/or other awarding body for helping to set and/or maintain the academic standards of their awards?
- What is your understanding of the responsibilities of the degree-awarding body 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? What use do you make of these reference points?
- In what ways are you 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? How do these activities contribute to helping to set and maintain academic standards?
- How do you ensure that your staff understand and carry out their responsibilities for helping to set and/or maintain academic standards?
- How do you engage with the academic framework and regulations of each degree-awarding body and/or other awarding organisation? If you are working with multiple bodies and/or if you have a regulatory framework of your own, how do you manage differences in what is required?
- What arrangements are in place for you to report back to the degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding bodies on how effectively you have carried out your responsibilities? How well are these arrangements working at your end?
- What gives you confidence in the academic standards of the provision you deliver?