Internal university quality assurance processes

Internal quality assurance

Higher education providers in the UK are autonomous, they are independent and not state-owned, or controlled by government authorities. Based on this principle, internal quality assurance processes are crucial to safeguard public confidence in academic standards and the quality of teaching and research. To ensure appropriate coordination, there are sector-wide reference points developed and/or recognised by higher education providers. The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) is the custodian of some of these sector-owned reference points (Quality Code, Subject Benchmark Statement, and Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies).

Institutional autonomy is a key principle in UK higher education, underpinning a diverse sector that offers students choice as institutions develop their distinct specialisms. This is made possible in part by higher education providers operating rigorous internal quality assurance processes that ensure all courses are subject to regular review, including those provided via transnational education, and where necessary, adjustment. The processes set out below are indicative of the approaches taken in an institution and can be seen in practice operating across institutions whatever their location within the UK. There may be slight variation in some cases to account for differences in institution, for example size and specialism, but all institutions will have an appropriate model that can be broadly aligned to the processes outlined here. This should be read alongside the description of the national quality assurance processes across the UK.

Institution-wide oversight

Institution-wide quality is ensured through:

- Academic governance processes through the institutional committee structure at different levels such as department, faculty and school.
- Institutional level monitoring including through the quality and standards committee, academic board, board of governors and internal audit processes.

- Institutional review of academic regulations and analysis of complaints and appeals.
- Internal approaches to ensure that academic provision is compliant with external regulatory frameworks, for example OfS conditions of registration or the national quality framework including QAA Review in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Ongoing programme evaluation

- Student Evaluation Surveys are used to capture student feedback including on structure, content and teaching delivery, and feed into review discussions.
- Annual monitoring of national datasets including the National Student Survey and other data such as student completion rates assess outcomes and performance against sector-wide and institution trends.
- Annual External Examiner reports offer independent, objective and subject-specific advice on modes of assessment and learning outcomes.

- Cyclical institutional Periodic and/or Programme Review and revalidation for a holistic review of the programme ensure that it remains up-to-date and high quality.
- Cyclical re-accreditation by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies where programmes require external accreditation to ensure content, delivery and assessment enables students to graduate with professionally recognised qualifications.

Developing a new programme

- Programmes go through internal validation processes including considerations of the learning outcomes, staffing, resourcing and internal regulations.
- Programmes are assessed by internal and external experts including academics, industry specialists and normally students.

- Programmes are assessed against UK-wide Framework for HE Qualifications and referenced against Subject Benchmark Statements
- External industry accreditation by professional, statutory or regulatory body is granted where required.

*We use "university", "institution" and "provider" as a shorthand in this document to refer to all higher education providers with degree awarding powers.