



# **UK Quality Code for Higher Education**

**Part B: Assuring and Enhancing  
Academic Quality**

**Chapter B1: Programme Design, Development  
and Approval**

PART  
**B**

# Contents

<b>About the Quality Code</b>	1
<b>About this Chapter</b>	3
<b>Introduction: Programme design, development and approval</b>	4
<b>Expectation</b>	7
<b>Indicators of sound practice</b>	8
The purpose and nature of programme design, development and approval	8
Processes for programme design, development and approval	11
Involvement in programme design, development and approval	12
<b>Appendix 1 - The Expectation and Indicators</b>	16
<b>Appendix 2 - Membership of the advisory group for this Chapter</b>	17
<b>References</b>	19

# About the Quality Code

The UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) is the definitive reference point for all UK higher education providers.<sup>1</sup> It makes clear what higher education providers are required to do, what they can expect of each other, and what the general public can expect of them. The Quality Code covers all four nations of the UK and all providers of UK higher education operating internationally. It protects the interests of all students, regardless of where they are studying or whether they are full-time, part-time, undergraduate or postgraduate students.

The Quality Code has three Parts. Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards contains three Chapters and seven Expectations. Each of the 11 Chapters of Part B: Assuring and Enhancing Academic Quality, and Part C: Information About Higher Education Provision contain a single Expectation. An Expectation expresses the key principle that the higher education community has identified as essential for the assurance of academic standards and quality within the area covered by the respective Chapter or Part. Higher education providers reviewed by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) are required to meet all the Expectations. The manner in which they do so is their own responsibility. QAA carries out reviews to check whether higher education providers are meeting the Expectations.<sup>2</sup>

The Expectations in Part C and each Chapter of Part B are accompanied by a series of Indicators that reflect sound practice, and through which providers can demonstrate they are meeting the relevant Expectation. Indicators are not designed to be used as a checklist; they are intended to help providers reflect on and develop their regulations, procedures and practices to demonstrate that the Expectations in the Quality Code are being met. Each Indicator is supported by an explanatory note that gives more information about it, together with examples of how the Indicator may be interpreted in practice. Indicators are grouped into clusters under a heading. There are no Indicators in Part A. The explanatory text provided directly supports the relevant Expectation.

Each Part and Chapter has been developed by QAA through an extensive process of consultation with higher education providers; their representative bodies; the National Union of Students; professional, statutory and regulatory bodies; and other interested parties. The *UK Quality Code for Higher Education: General Introduction*<sup>3</sup> should be considered in conjunction with this document. It provides a technical introduction for users, including guidance concerning the terminology used and a quick-reference glossary. A more detailed glossary is available on QAA's website.<sup>4</sup>

## The Quality Code and legislation

Higher education providers are responsible for meeting the requirements of legislation and any other regulatory requirements placed upon them, for example by funding bodies. The Quality Code does not interpret legislation nor does it incorporate statutory or regulatory requirements. Sources of information about other requirements and examples of guidance and good practice are signposted within the Part or Chapter where appropriate. Higher education providers are responsible for how they use these resources.

## Equality and diversity in the Quality Code

The Quality Code promotes an inclusive approach by embedding consideration of equality and diversity matters throughout. Promoting equality involves treating everyone with equal dignity and worth, irrespective of the group or groups to which they belong, while also raising aspirations and supporting achievement for people with diverse requirements, entitlements and backgrounds. An inclusive environment for learning anticipates the varied requirements of learners, for example, because of a declared disability, specific cultural background, location or age, and aims to ensure that all students have equal access to educational opportunities. Higher education providers, staff and students all have a role in and responsibility for promoting equality.

Equality of opportunity involves enabling access for people who have differing individual requirements as well as eliminating arbitrary and unnecessary barriers to learning. In addition, disabled students and non-disabled students are offered learning opportunities that are equally accessible to them, by means of inclusive design wherever possible and by means of reasonable individual adjustments wherever

necessary. Offering an equal opportunity to learn is distinguished from every student having an equal chance of success, because this is dependent on a range of factors including their motivation and engagement in learning.

All higher education providers have legal obligations which they must meet, for example in relation to equality of opportunity and eliminating unlawful discrimination (in the UK particular considerations, such as the anticipatory duty to provide reasonable adjustments, apply to disabled students). The Quality Code does not seek to duplicate or interpret these requirements.

## About this Chapter

This publication supersedes the *Code of Practice for the Assurance of Academic Quality and Standards in Higher Education (Code of Practice), Section 7: Programme Design, Approval, Monitoring and Review* (2006), published by QAA, as it relates to programme design, development and approval, and forms a Chapter of the Quality Code. Programme monitoring and review are addressed in *Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review* of the Quality Code. The evaluation of the Academic Infrastructure and consultation on subsequent changes identified the need for the Quality Code, which was developed as a result, to have a clear structure, based on the student life cycle. *Chapter B1* addresses the initial design and development of a programme and the processes which lead to a decision by the degree-awarding body that it may be delivered in the agreed form. *Chapters B2 to B7* of the Quality Code consider various topics related to the operation of the programme. *Chapter B8* discusses the mechanisms which higher education providers use to reflect on the programme once it is running, and to determine how it can be improved. *Chapter B8* also addresses matters relating to closure of existing programmes.

This Chapter should be read alongside Part A of the Quality Code: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards.

This Chapter was subject to public consultation between June and August 2013 and was published in October 2013. It became a reference point for the purpose of reviews carried out by QAA from August 2014.

# Introduction: Programme design, development and approval

UK higher education is based on the principle of the autonomy and responsibility of the degree-awarding body for the academic standards and quality of learning opportunities of the programmes it offers and the qualifications and credit it awards. There is no national curriculum for higher education, and higher education providers decide what programmes to offer within the context of their organisational mission and other strategic factors. These may include government policy to stimulate economic growth and to support strategically important and vulnerable subjects, an assessment of student demand for existing and new programmes, and advice from external bodies such as employers and industry about workforce needs. This independence is a strength of UK higher education as it enables higher education providers to offer a variety of programmes reflecting the needs of an increasingly diverse range of students.

The processes of programme design, development and approval are an essential part of higher education providers' internal quality assurance and enhancement. They ensure that appropriate academic standards are set and maintained and the programmes offered to students make available learning opportunities which enable the intended learning outcomes to be achieved. This Chapter addresses the operation and effectiveness of those processes. Ultimate responsibility for the approval of programmes rests with degree-awarding bodies. However, all higher education providers are involved in elements of programme design, development and approval. The extent to which roles and authority for programme design, development and approval are delegated to a delivery organisation with whom a degree-awarding body works is defined in the agreement between the two bodies. This Chapter is therefore relevant to both degree-awarding bodies and delivery organisations to help them to discharge their responsibilities for setting and maintaining academic standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities in relation to programme design, development and approval. For further detail, see Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards and *Chapter B10: Managing Higher Education Provision with Others* of the Quality Code.

## Iterative processes

Programme design, development and approval depend on reflection and critical self-assessment by individuals, groups and higher education providers. Designing a programme is a creative activity, which leads to an iterative process of development, depending on feedback from a range of sources, which may include other staff, students, employers and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies. Programme approval involves a number of steps, but there is clarity for all parties involved about the point at which the degree-awarding body definitively approves a programme for delivery.

Higher education provision is dynamic, and programmes are continually evaluated and revised to improve the learning experience for students and to maintain the currency of the curriculum. The themes of this Chapter therefore remain relevant at all stages of the programme lifecycle, as part of an integrated approach, and are closely linked to programme monitoring and review, which are addressed in *Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review*. The focus of this Chapter is on the design, development and approval of programmes, both new programmes and when existing programmes undergo substantial change, which in effect results in a reconsideration of the aims and hence design of the programme. The Chapter is also relevant when a programme is re-approved if, for example, the original approval was for a fixed time period. Processes for managing minor changes to programmes and the closure of an existing programme are addressed in *Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review*, reflecting when they occur within the context of a programme lifecycle.

## Effective processes

UK higher education providers are diverse, and each has processes for programme design, development and approval which reflect individual missions and goals, while also ensuring the security of academic standards and quality of learning opportunities. These processes are clearly set out in ways which make evident their application to the higher education provider's context. Higher education providers apply their

processes systematically and operate them consistently; the processes are capable of being applied to all higher education offered by a provider, but respect differences between subjects, modes and levels of study. Processes are not unduly burdensome or complicated, taking into account an assessment of the risks involved. Decisions are based on evidence, processes operate in a transparent way, and an appropriate level of resource is applied to ensure the required outcomes of the process are achieved.

Programme design, development and approval may involve many different organisational and operational departments within the higher education provider, such as academic departments, professional services, and central registry, strategic planning or quality assurance functions. The balance of responsibilities is clearly defined and understood, and all those involved are made aware of the outcomes of decisions.

## Fostering creativity

Programme design, development and approval are opportunities for higher education providers to encourage innovation, alongside a culture of continuous improvement of provision. Programmes may reflect developments in the subject area or in educational research and practice. For example, programmes may embrace new technologies or innovative modes of delivery and study, including those which offer flexibility to students taking the programme.

## Promoting equality

In setting out criteria to be considered in the design and development of programmes and testing the fulfilment of these criteria in programme approval, higher education providers take into account the entitlements of a body of students who reflect the diversity of protected characteristics and prior educational experience, and promote the development of inclusive practice.

## Terminology

In this Chapter, as throughout the Quality Code, **programme** is used to describe any stand-alone, approved curriculum followed by a student, which contributes to a qualification of a degree-awarding body or otherwise carries academic credit where credit is used. The provision may be of any length or credit value, and includes pre-defined programmes leading to a specific qualification, multidisciplinary programmes, pathways through a modular scheme, short periods of study leading to the award of academic credit, as well as programmes where the specific content is negotiated between the higher education provider and an individual student. In general terms, the Chapter applies to provision at all levels of the national frameworks for higher education qualifications. Individual higher education providers ensure their processes for programme design, development and approval of research degrees are appropriate to their research environment (for more detail see *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*). Higher education providers determine the extent to which their processes for programme design, development and approval are applicable to other awards which do not carry academic credit.

Where a programme is made up of more than one self-contained, formally structured unit, these units are described as **modules**. Much of this Chapter may also be applied, proportionately as appropriate, to modules in their own right.

Programme **design** is a creative activity, which may result in innovative ideas for higher education provision. It is followed by a process of **development** which leads to the creation of a programme. Through this process, the content, modes of delivery, structure and components of the programme, including assessment methods and the means by which students will be engaged with the curriculum, are considered. The development process may also be used to enhance an existing programme, for example in response to the outcomes of programme monitoring and review (see *Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review*).

**Approval** refers to the formal processes by which a degree-awarding body agrees that a programme may be offered for study by students.

Higher education providers may use different terminology to that adopted in this Chapter or use the same terminology in different ways, reflecting their individual history and approach. Higher education providers are clear about how terminology is used within the context of their own processes. For example, some

higher education providers may use the term validation rather than approval, or may use validation to refer to the event which forms the end point of the approval process.

## **External links**

Higher education providers are responsible for ascertaining which laws and regulations apply to them. To meet the Expectation of this Chapter of the Quality Code, higher education providers may wish to consider the indicative lists of further guidelines, references and resources. QAA takes no responsibility for the content of external websites.

# Expectation

The Quality Code sets out the following Expectation about programme design, development and approval, which higher education providers are required to meet.

**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.**

# Indicators of sound practice

## The purpose and nature of programme design, development and approval

### Indicator 1

**Higher education providers maintain strategic oversight of the processes for, and outcomes of, programme design, development and approval, to ensure processes are applied systematically and operated consistently.**

A strategic approach to the outcomes of programme design, development and approval considers how proposed provision reflects a higher education provider's mission and strategic goals, as well as assuring academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. Processes are coherent and transparent. Higher education providers promote a shared understanding of their approach to programme design, development and approval among their staff, students and other stakeholders; this enables those responsible for programme design and development to take strategic priorities into account. The strategic approach embraces differences between academic disciplines and modes, levels and locations of study. Programme development and approval forms part of the higher education provider's strategic and academic resources planning, within the context of the provider's overall portfolio, including any learning opportunities delivered by others (see *Chapter B10: Managing Higher Education Provision with Others*). Programme approval processes enable higher education providers to assure themselves that sufficient and appropriate physical, human and learning resources are available.

The final decision to approve a programme is fully informed by evidence from analysis of both its business case and its academic merits. Higher education providers facilitate integration between these two aspects, for example in relation to findings from market research indicating student interest in a programme or input from employers or professional, statutory and regulatory bodies. Appropriate safeguards are established to protect against competing priorities. Effective reporting structures ensure that both cases are considered independently but in a timely fashion.

### Decision-making

Decisions relating to the processes for, and outcomes of, programme design, development and approval are taken at the appropriate level within the higher education provider, and the location of authority is made clear. Decisions are taken independently of those involved in developing and delivering the programme, to ensure objectivity. Where any function is delegated, mechanisms are put in place to monitor the operation of this delegation and to ensure sufficient oversight at an organisational level. When the approval of a programme is dependent on any conditions or recommendations, higher education providers determine how the fulfilment of these will be monitored, including any conditions which are to be met before students are registered on the programme. See *Chapter A2: Degree-Awarding Bodies' Reference Points for Academic Standards* and *Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards*.

Higher education providers consider where efficiency may be improved or duplication reduced by aligning requirements within programme design, development and approval processes to those of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies.

## Indicator 2

**Higher education providers make clear the criteria against which programme proposals are assessed in the programme approval process.**

### The purpose of the programme

Programme design and development begins with determining the intended purpose(s) of the programme within the context of the higher education provider's strategic approach. These may include personal, professional, vocational and/or academic development; preparation for knowledge creation and research; or preparation for specific or general employment. Once the purpose of the programme has been established, programme design considers which intended learning outcomes are necessary to achieve that purpose and how students are enabled to achieve these. This takes into account the knowledge, understanding and skills which students are intended to gain, and the level of knowledge, understanding and skills which they are expected to have on entry to the programme. The mechanisms by which students demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the learning outcomes are also planned, as well as any formative assessment elements (see *Chapter B6: Assessment of Students and the Recognition of Prior Learning*).

Higher education providers determine the criteria which underpin effective programme design within their organisational context, and support staff to understand and engage with them. They determine how programme approval processes ensure that the criteria have been reflected within the programme, that sources of good practice in programme design have been drawn upon, including any specified by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies, and that the appropriate development process has been followed. These criteria are also considered where a programme is agreed through negotiation with an individual student.

Programme design, development and approval processes identify the level of the qualification or credit awarded, its location within and alignment with the degree-awarding body's internal academic framework, the relevant national framework for higher education qualifications, other guidance on qualifications, and Subject Benchmark Statements where relevant. Further guidance is available in Part A of the Quality Code: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards.

### The organisation of the programme

Programme design considers how a programme is organised to enable students to achieve the intended learning outcomes, in terms of student workload, volume and nature of assessment, progression through the programme, and increasing intellectual demand. Account is taken of the entitlements of students with protected characteristics in determining the programme structure, to ensure, for example, that there is sufficient flexibility. Higher education providers determine the appropriate balance between factors such as practical and academic study, modes and location of study, the use of technology, directed and independent learning, breadth and depth of subject content, and opportunities for personal and academic development. Programme approval processes ensure that the programme as a whole is coherent, in terms of its logic in structure and intellectual integrity, and assessment methods are aligned with the programme content, learning outcomes and learning and teaching activities.

Higher education providers promote inclusive practices in learning and teaching. The learning opportunities offered provide every student with an equal opportunity to achieve the intended learning outcomes. Through processes for programme approval, higher education providers take into account the entitlements of students with protected characteristics, including ensuring that intended learning outcomes, learning and teaching activities, learning environments and planned assessment methods do not create any unnecessary barriers. The criteria to be considered in programme design and development, and tested in programme approval ensure that the needs of the range of students likely to engage with the programme are taken into account (see *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching* and *Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement*).

## Use of data

Processes include the need to consider relevant qualitative and quantitative information available to inform both programme design and development, and decisions on programme approval. These data include market research, student performance measures and feedback, and other organisational information, which may be derived from related areas when a new programme is under consideration. Where possible, data are disaggregated by protected characteristic in order to identify any differential impact on particular groups of students.

## Outcomes of programme approval

When a programme is approved, a definitive record is made, which becomes the reference point for the delivery of the programme (*Chapter A2: Degree-Awarding Bodies' Reference Points for Academic Standards*). This includes a clear and informative name for the programme and whether the programme is approved to be delivered for a fixed time period or indefinitely, subject to usual monitoring and review. See Part C of the Quality Code: Information about Higher Education Provision, on information higher education providers make available about programmes for their intended audiences.

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### Further guidelines, references and resources

Equality Act 2010

[www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents)

The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) Regulations 2011

[www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2011/2260/contents/made](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2011/2260/contents/made)

Equality Challenge Unit (2011) Public Sector Equality Duty: Specific Duties for England

[www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/files/public-sector-equality-duty-specific-duties-for-england](http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/files/public-sector-equality-duty-specific-duties-for-england)

Equality Challenge Unit (2011) The Public Sector Equality Duty: Specific duties for Wales

[www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/the-public-sector-equality-duty-specific-duties-for-wales/](http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/the-public-sector-equality-duty-specific-duties-for-wales/)

Equality Challenge Unit (2010) Anti-Discrimination Law in Northern Ireland

[www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/anti-discrimination-law-in-northern-ireland](http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/anti-discrimination-law-in-northern-ireland)

QAA (2011) Outcomes from Institutional Audit 2007-09: Managing learning opportunities

[www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication/?PubID=138](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication/?PubID=138)

QAA Scotland Enhancement Themes: Developing and Supporting the Curriculum

[www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/enhancement-themes/developing-and-supporting-the-curriculum](http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/enhancement-themes/developing-and-supporting-the-curriculum)

QAA Scotland Enhancement Themes: Flexible Delivery

[www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/enhancement-themes/completed-enhancement-themes/flexible-delivery](http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/enhancement-themes/completed-enhancement-themes/flexible-delivery)

QAA Scotland (2013) Enhancement and innovation in Higher Education Conference 11 - 13 June 2013: Conference Materials

[www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/enhancement-themes-conference/conference-resources](http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/enhancement-themes-conference/conference-resources)

Higher Education Statistics Agency (2011) What is a Course?

[www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=2353&Itemid=161](http://www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2353&Itemid=161)

HEFCE (2012) Innovation in the Market Assurance of New Programmes

[http://i-map.org.uk/i-MAP\\_guidance\\_2014.pdf](http://i-map.org.uk/i-MAP_guidance_2014.pdf)

Higher Education Academy (2011) Inclusive Curriculum Design in Higher Education

[www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/inclusion/Disability/Inclusive\\_curriculum\\_design\\_in\\_higher\\_education](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/inclusion/Disability/Inclusive_curriculum_design_in_higher_education)

Higher Education Academy (2014) The Pedagogy of the Massive Open Online Course (MOOC): the UK view

[www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/elt/the\\_pedagogy\\_of\\_the\\_MOOC\\_UK\\_view](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/elt/the_pedagogy_of_the_MOOC_UK_view)

JISC (2013) Enhancing Curriculum Design with Technology

[www.jisc.ac.uk/sites/default/files/enhancing-curriculum-design.pdf](http://www.jisc.ac.uk/sites/default/files/enhancing-curriculum-design.pdf)

JISC: Institutional Approaches to Curriculum Design, The Rough Guide to Curriculum Design

<http://jiscdesignstudio.pbworks.com/w/file/63018351/The%20Rough%20Guide%20to%20Curriculum%20Design%20Narrative%20Version%20-%20PBFinalEdit%20OJFormattingEdit.pdf>

JISC: Institutional Approaches to Curriculum Design, Viewpoints

<http://wiki.ulster.ac.uk/display/VPR/Home>

JISC: Institutional Approaches to Curriculum Design, Cloudworks

<http://cloudworks.ac.uk/cloudscape/view/1882>

JISC (2012) Institutional Approaches to Curriculum Design: Final Synthesis Report

<https://files.pbworks.com/download/JilpvLhMpf/jiscdesignstudio/61216296/JISC%20Curriculum%20Design%20Final%20Synthesis%20i1.pdf>

JISC Design Studio: Curriculum Change and Transformation

<http://jiscdesignstudio.pbworks.com/w/page/57414310/Curriculum%20Change%20and%20Transformation>

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## Processes for programme design, development and approval

### Indicator 3

**Higher education providers define processes, roles and responsibilities for programme design, development and approval and communicate them to those involved.**

Higher education providers make clear the processes to be followed for the design, development and approval of programmes. This includes responsibility for initiating and managing the process, indicative, realistic timescales, and the criteria on which decisions are taken. Attention is paid to the terminology used, to aid clear understanding. Higher education providers define the respective roles, responsibilities and authority of different individuals and bodies involved in programme design, development and approval. Those involved are clear about their individual role, the hierarchy of procedures and the location of ultimate responsibility, including where a degree-awarding body works with a delivery organisation to offer higher education (see *Chapter A2: Degree-Awarding Bodies' Reference Points for Academic Standards* and *Chapter B10: Managing Higher Education Provision with Others*). Sufficient account is taken of the importance of objectivity and impartiality in decision-making. Responsibility and mechanisms for identifying, disseminating and embedding good practice are also determined.

Higher education providers determine how this information is recorded and communicated.

The information is accessible to those who need to know about programme design and the processes for programme development and approval, which includes staff and students directly involved and those who support them, as well as those involved in taking decisions at any stage, both within and external to the higher education provider (see Part C of the Quality Code: Information about higher education provision).

#### Indicator 4

**Higher education providers evaluate their processes for programme design, development and approval and take action to improve them where necessary.**

The regular evaluation of processes for programme design, development and approval is a focus for organisational improvement and higher education providers determine how often they carry out such evaluation. Evaluation considers the benefits gained from carrying out the processes and how their outcomes promote enhancement of the student learning experience. It also examines whether processes remain fit for purpose and identifies opportunities for improvement, including in the definition of roles and responsibilities and any delegation of authority. Student views contribute to the evaluation; for example, they may be used to reflect on whether the processes provide sufficient opportunities for student input, and whether that input reflects the views of a diverse range of students (see *Chapter B5: Student Engagement*).

Evaluation highlights good practice, and higher education providers have in place mechanisms to disseminate this, both internally within the provider and, if appropriate, externally within the wider higher education sector. The evaluation is also an opportunity to learn from practice elsewhere within the higher education sector.

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#### Further guidelines, references and resources

Irish Universities Quality Board (2012) National Guidelines of Good Practice for the Approval, Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes  
[www.qqi.ie/Publications/Good%20Practice%20Guide%20-%20For%20the%20Approval,%20Monitoring%20and%20Periodic%20Review%20of%20Programmes%20and%20Awards%20in%20Irish%20Universities.pdf](http://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Good%20Practice%20Guide%20-%20For%20the%20Approval,%20Monitoring%20and%20Periodic%20Review%20of%20Programmes%20and%20Awards%20in%20Irish%20Universities.pdf)

QAA: Review Knowledgebase  
[www.qaa.ac.uk/improving-higher-education/knowledgebase-search](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/improving-higher-education/knowledgebase-search)

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## Involvement in programme design, development and approval

#### Indicator 5

**Higher education providers make use of reference points and expertise from outside the programme in programme design and in their processes for programme development and approval.**

#### National and European reference points

Alignment with national and European reference points ensures that the academic standards set for a programme are appropriate. Relevant reference points include the national frameworks for higher education qualifications and credit, other guidance on qualifications, Subject Benchmark Statements and the requirements of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies. Part A of the Quality Code: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards addresses this topic in more detail.

Consideration of reference points also provides a stimulus for creativity and innovation, by suggesting different approaches to the design and delivery of programmes.

## Expertise from outside the programme

Taking advice from individuals not directly involved with the programme contributes to both setting and maintaining academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. Individuals may be drawn from other subject areas or professional services within the higher education provider or from other organisations, depending on their role. In programme approval, the involvement of individuals external to the higher education provider is necessary to offer independence and objectivity to the decisions taken. This contributes to the transparency of the process and provides a basis for comparability of academic standards across the higher education sector.

In this context, higher education providers ensure that they are able to receive appropriate advice on academic standards from the external individuals involved, together with any other expertise those individuals are able to contribute (see *Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards*).

Advice from individuals external to the programme also contributes to enhancement, by providing additional perspectives. External advice provides expertise on current developments both in the subject area and in learning and teaching practices, and is sought from a variety of sources. The range of individuals involved aligns with the objectives of the programme. Individuals able to offer advice may include:

- academic staff within the higher education provider but from a different subject area
- staff within the higher education provider with professional services expertise, such as educational developers, library and learning resources staff, learning technologists, disability practitioners and equality and diversity practitioners
- staff from other higher education providers
- contacts made through partnerships, at other higher education providers, in industry or professional practice, or through research collaborations
- 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 (on the role of such bodies, see Part A of the Quality Code: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards)
- external examiners (on the role of external examiners in contributing to programme design, development and approval, see *Chapter B7: External Examining*)
- employers, for example through industrial advisory boards
- organisations in the communities with which the higher education provider works
- where higher education is provided in association with others, representatives from the delivery organisation or support provider (see *Chapter B10: Managing Higher Education Provision with Others*)
- former students 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 (see *Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review*).

## Indicator 6

**Higher education providers involve students in programme design and in processes for programme development and approval.**

Students are able to make a valuable contribution to their own higher education experience and that of others; *Chapter B5: Student Engagement* discusses the creation of a culture of engagement in more detail. In relation to programme design and processes for development and approval, student participation in the processes may be formal or informal, and involve a spectrum of different levels of engagement.

There is clarity about the roles and responsibilities of those involved. For example, in developing a programme, student views may be sought on proposed content through focus groups, or students may be members of panels taking decisions on programme approval. Higher education providers take steps to ensure that feedback represents 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.

It may be challenging when new programmes are designed and developed to collect meaningful student input. Feedback may be sought from students studying in cognate areas or on generic elements of the programme such as personal development planning. Students may also contribute, for example, to identifying issues relating to equality of opportunity within the programme and the balance of student workload and assessment across the programme. Higher education providers make clear to students how the proposed new programme fits within the current portfolio.

Student involvement in quality systems is addressed in more detail in *Chapter B5: Student Engagement*. Student engagement in learning is addressed in *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*.

## Indicator 7

**Higher education providers enable staff and other participants to contribute effectively to programme design, development and approval by putting in place appropriate arrangements for their support and development.**

Programme design and processes for programme development and approval involve staff from across the higher education provider and from other organisations with whom they work, including academic teaching staff, professional services staff, such as educational developers and learning technologists, and quality assurance officers. Others with relevant expertise, such as employers, may also be involved.

Higher education providers enable all those involved to fulfil their role effectively, through appropriate opportunities for support, training and continuing personal and professional development.

Higher education providers may arrange 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 approval panels.

As well as recognising the level of engagement, in terms of time and effort, required for effective programme design and development, higher education providers facilitate staff to work together, so that they are able to draw on their collective experience and develop innovative ideas. Once a programme is approved, higher education providers ensure the staff who will be delivering it are supported, in advance of the first students entering the programme. Higher education providers facilitate staff who have not been part of the design, development and approval of the programme but are involved in teaching or supporting student learning to gain an understanding of the aims, structure and content of the programme.

Higher education providers recognise the value for their own provision of facilitating staff involvement in programme design, development and approval at other higher education providers.

The continuing professional development of staff who teach and enable student development and achievement is covered in more detail in *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching* and *Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement*.

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### **Further guidelines, references and resources**

The Higher Education Academy (2011) *UK Professional Standards Framework*  
[www.heacademy.ac.uk/ukpsf](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ukpsf)

sparqs (2012) *A Student Engagement Framework for Scotland*  
[www.sparqs.ac.uk/culture.php?page=168](http://www.sparqs.ac.uk/culture.php?page=168)

WISE: Wales Initiative for Student Engagement  
[www.wisewales.com/](http://www.wisewales.com/)

QAA (2011) *Outcomes from Institutional Audit 2007-09: External involvement in quality management*  
[www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication/?PubID=136](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication/?PubID=136)

Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA)  
[www.seda.ac.uk](http://www.seda.ac.uk)

National Union of Students  
[www.nus.org.uk](http://www.nus.org.uk)

National Union of Students: Equality in the Curriculum  
[www.nusconnect.org.uk/campaigns/highereducation/archived/learning-and-teaching-hub/equalityinthecurriculum/](http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/campaigns/highereducation/archived/learning-and-teaching-hub/equalityinthecurriculum/)

Learning Design Support Environment  
<https://sites.google.com/a/lkl.ac.uk/ldse/>

University of Bath (2013) *Student Engagement in Learning and Teaching Quality Management: A Study of UK Practices*  
[www.bath.ac.uk/learningandteaching/student-engagement/qaa-student-engagement-project-2012-13.html](http://www.bath.ac.uk/learningandteaching/student-engagement/qaa-student-engagement-project-2012-13.html)

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# Appendix 1 - The Expectation and Indicators Programme Design, Development and Approval

## The Expectation

The Quality Code sets out the following Expectation about programme design and approval, which higher education providers are required to meet.

**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.**

## The Indicators of sound practice

### Indicator 1

Higher education providers maintain strategic oversight of the processes for, and outcomes of, programme design, development and approval, to ensure processes are applied systematically and operated consistently.

### Indicator 2

Higher education providers make clear the criteria against which programme proposals are assessed in the programme approval process.

### Indicator 3

Higher education providers define processes, roles and responsibilities for programme design, development and approval and communicate them to those involved.

### Indicator 4

Higher education providers evaluate their processes for programme design, development and approval and take action to improve them where necessary.

### Indicator 5

Higher education providers make use of reference points and expertise from outside the programme in programme design and in their processes for programme development and approval.

### Indicator 6

Higher education providers involve students in programme design and in processes for programme development and approval.

### Indicator 7

Higher education providers enable staff and other participants to contribute effectively to programme design, development and approval by putting in place appropriate arrangements for their support and development.

## Appendix 2 - Membership of the advisory group for this Chapter

<b>Name</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>
Janet Alleyne	Head of Quality Management and Audit Unit	University of Ulster
Harriet Barnes	Development Officer	QAA
Janet Bohrer	Assistant Director	QAA
Dr Richard Brown	Assistant Director of Quality & Standards (Programmes and Awards)	Canterbury Christ Church University
Professor Peter Bullen	Emeritus Professor	University of Hertfordshire
Dr Colleen Connor	Dean of Learning and Teaching	Cardiff Metropolitan University
Tom Evershed	Higher Education Manager	Warwickshire College
Rebecca Freeman	Educational Strategy and Communications Officer	University of Warwick
Dr Richard Kamm	Head of Learning and Teaching Quality, School of Management	University of Bath
Simon Macklin	Pro-Provost (Student Experience)	Greenwich School of Management
Dr Christine Macpherson	Assistant Director	QAA Scotland
Professor Clare Morris	Independent	
Dr Charles Neame	Reader in Learning and Teaching Practice Development	Glasgow School of Art
Aloma Onyemah	Equality and Diversity Officer	Sheffield Hallam University
Nicola Owen	Chief Administrative Officer	Lancaster University

Dr Anne Rixom      Head of Operations, London      University of Liverpool

Jessica Robinson      Head of Academic Quality and Standards      University of Cumbria

# References

<sup>1</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/qualitycode](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/qualitycode)

<sup>2</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education)

<sup>3</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=181](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=181)

<sup>4</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us/glossary](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us/glossary)

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