Engaging with the UK Quality Code for higher education

A further education and sixth form college perspective

May 2014
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Executive summary

Between January and April 2014 the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) carried out a survey and regional workshops for the colleges higher education sector to gain further awareness of current engagement with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code). The research sought to capture information about when the Quality Code was being accessed and to identify enabling or inhibiting factors. The intention of the data was to inform the development of a guide to the Quality Code for further education and sixth form colleges offering higher education.

The survey received 102 responses from 48 providers of higher education, and the workshops were attended by 227 people from 112 providers or representatives of higher education networks. All regions of England and Wales contributed to the research.

For the purpose of developing a cross-college guide, representation across the roles and departments was sought: although the majority of responses were from quality or higher education curriculum managers. Marketing, technical or facilities departments were not registered at events or seen to respond to the online survey, although the relationship between their work and the Quality Code was explored through the workshop discussions. Identifying these departments often held cross-college responsibilities, to meet the requirements of further education and higher education students, and the expectations for provision of higher education may have been incorporated through strategic planning: without acknowledgement or direct correlation to the Quality Code.

Highest interaction with the Quality Code was during:

- revalidation of qualifications
- validation of new qualifications
- annual reviews
- staff inductions/training.

The interaction with the Quality Code was identified as being closely related to the role and responsibilities of the delegates, although this was dependent on the size and internal structure of the provider. Therefore development of a guide based on roles could cause confusion, whereas it was possible to identify core activities and build support from this perspective.

The majority of responses confirmed the terminology and style of the Quality Code are accessible and respondents were confident or very confident engaging with the Quality Code.

The workshops identified that when colleagues fully understood the evidencing procedures of their degree awarding body it became easier to adapt their own quality processes. Therefore ensuring their quality processes, inclusive of their strategic aims, could be evidenced accurately, without creating complex or duplicating systems. Discussions within the workshops identified that staff who were accustomed to the culture of compliance with predetermined further education quality processes had greater difficulty understanding and engaging with this autonomous nature of quality in higher education. This was irrespective of their role within the further education college.

The survey established three main areas where additional guidance and support would be valued:

- policy writing referenced to the Quality Code; to include mapping guidance
- programme design, including assessment
- meeting the expectations of Chapter B3: Learning and teaching
A range of enabling factors which had furthered cross-college understanding of, and raised confidence and increased engagement with, the Quality Code were identified as:

- creating 'champions' of the Quality Code in the departments
- all staff training to explore the higher education ethos, the concept of autonomy and how this would impact their job role and individual responsibilities
- furthering awareness of the expectations of the Quality Code and the differentiation of provision for higher education students across departments
- increasing communication with degree awarding bodies through mentoring and sharing knowledge of higher education processes
- additional internal and external training opportunities which correlate activities to the Quality Code and identify methods of evidencing through current planning and evaluation processes
- furthering awareness of QAA online resources, publications and guides.

The preferred format of the guide was a self-created PDF, accessed online and containing appropriate information using a variety of techniques, for example case studies. Meanwhile, the workshops were able to identify key scenarios or activities which the guide could be aimed at, to raise awareness of the diversity of solutions and as a platform from which providers could develop their own appropriate process.
Findings

Response rate

The survey received 102 responses from 47 providers of higher education, while the workshops were attended by 227 people from 121 providers or representatives of higher education networks. All regions of England and Wales contributed to the research.

For the purposes of this report we will refer to the data collated through online or workshop discussions which supported the qualitative research from which information was obtained. Percentages are rounded up to the nearest whole number. Free text responses have been edited for clarity and to remove elements which might identify the higher education provider so should not be seen as verbatim quotes.

Regional data collection: number of providers who contributed to the data collection:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Online</th>
<th>Workshops</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North East</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorkshire</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Midlands</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Midlands</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East of England</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East England</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South West England</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We were interested in capturing information to establish who and which departments were actively engaging with the Quality Code and if this was for specific times during the academic journey.
The following roles/departments contributed to the data collection:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role or department</th>
<th>Online %</th>
<th>Workshop %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student representative at your university/college</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programme leader</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course leader</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturer (with assessment/curriculum planning responsibilities)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturer (with no assessment/curriculum planning responsibilities)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Careers adviser in school/college</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student support officer or related role</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality manager for higher education</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality administrator</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admissions manager</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research academic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human resources - staff development</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International development officer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching and learning manager</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing Officer</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical or facilities manager</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher education curriculum manager</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other higher education senior manager</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representative of a professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External examiner</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vice principal</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnership Department</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Co-ordinator</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the purpose of developing a guide there was significant representation across the majority of roles and departments. Staff from the marketing, technical or facilities departments did not respond to the survey or attend the events, however discussions regarding the relationship between their work and the Quality Code took place with their colleagues through the workshops. It was noted these departments often held cross-college responsibilities and that the specific expectations for provision of higher education may have been effectively incorporated through strategic planning, without acknowledgement or direct correlation to the Quality Code.

**Interaction with the Quality Code**

The survey identified the highest interaction with the Quality Code was during:

- revalidation of qualifications
- validation of qualifications
- annual reviews
- staff inductions.
The diversity and scale of provision was continuously highlighted during the workshops and the higher level of interaction with the Quality Code during the revalidation and validation processes reflected how the Quality Code was being accessed as a referencing guide. As the degree-awarding body remains responsible for their qualification regardless of where the programme is delivered, or who provides it on their behalf, it was identified that during the validation or revalidation of a qualification when opportunities for colleges to develop autonomous processes could be discussed. However, they would need to understand how the quality process could be developed autonomously to take into account their unique needs, traditions and culture of their own organisation while ensuring the academic standards and agreements with their degree-awarding body could be successfully met and maintained.

Discussions within the workshops identified that staff who were accustomed to the culture of compliance with a predetermined further education quality process had greater difficulty understanding and engaging with the autonomous nature of quality in higher education. This was irrespective of their role within the further education college. Therefore additional training for new members of staff regarding these differences and how to implement and evidence the Quality Code, in relation to their self development, planning or evaluation process would be beneficial.

The departments with the lower respondent rates in the survey, and attendance in the workshops, was reflective of times when the Quality Code was referred to least: particularly during the planning and implementation of marketing.
Additional guidance was requested to support colleagues:

- when completing specific activities, for example staff appraisal
- during induction for both new staff and for experienced staff entering different job roles
- during training as continuing professional development to raise awareness of external requirements

The workshops also identified how colleges who fully understood their degree-awarding body procedures found it easier to adapt their own processes, ensuring they were able to evidence accurately, without creating complex or duplicating systems. When multiple awarding bodies, franchises, or alternate higher education level qualifications were simultaneously being offered individual responsibilities often became unclear. As the provision of further education quality processes would not usually be predominantly applied within a higher education institute, the requirement for the college to consider how their processes would correlate was found to be essential, thus aiming to reduce the use of multiple processes using a range of evaluation or planning criteria at a later date. Therefore additional training could clarify responsibilities related to roles or departments, and identify opportunities for autonomy and how they could effectively evidence how they meet the expectations of the Quality Code.

The Quality Code has a general introduction which explains the purpose and nature of the Quality Code and a main body, consisting of three parts: Part A: Setting and maintaining academic standards, Part B: Assuring and enhancing academic quality and Part C: Information about higher education provision which address academic standards, academic quality and information respectively. Through the survey responses it was possible to cross reference the current interaction to the Chapters most frequently accessed.
Within the workshops the interaction with the Quality Code was identified as being closely related to the role and responsibilities of the delegates. However as this was dependent on the size and internal structure of the provider it was established that matching activities to roles within a guide could cause confusion, although it may be possible to identify the activity, task or query and build support from this perspective.
Furthering confidence in engaging with the Quality Code

The survey aimed to provide further understanding on who was confident in interpreting and applying the Quality Code, with the workshops then able to explore inhibiting factors and how these could be overcome with a guide.

The workshops identified that many quality and higher education managers were familiar with mapping the Quality Code against aspects of their provision, or through the academic life cycle and were confident identifying where indicators and expectations could be evidenced. Although mapping was also identified as a process which sometimes became over complicated, with the creation of too much information. However, the use of mapping exercises was as an effective internal auditing method which identified areas which could be developed further to comply with the Quality Code expectations.

For those who had completed mapping exercises it was common for them to have employed cross-college processes which mirrored a total quality management system. Whereby integration of the Quality Code sections into the planning and evaluation processes took place and ensured department or individual awareness of responsibilities were considered and documented. For example, within the annual appraisal staff evaluated and planned their development against the expectations of Chapter B3. This was considered an effective methodology whereby staff gained both extended knowledge of the Quality Code and confidence in their ability to meet or exceed expectations.

The majority considered the terminology and style of the Quality Code as accessible although there was a recommendation for clarity in regard to responsibilities and how the indicators could be applied to their specific roles or activities. The Quality Code as a document was seen to be a valuable tool which could be easily transferred into a training guide within providers independently.
Additional recommendations to consider within the guide were:

- provision of bullet point information sheets, exemplars and case studies to enable staff to recognise how they may already be meeting expectations
- development of a brief guide to contextualise the purpose of the Quality Code and clarity why the reviews take place and how they differ from further education inspections
- bite size chunks of knowledge
- case studies or training events where the sharing of current practices could be discussed, specifically for overcoming the challenges of differentiation when accessed by both higher education and further education students
- informal discussion platforms
- links to share sound practice; for example to the Good Practice Knowledgebase
- considerations of size and diversity of providers used in the exemplars or case studies
- include a glossary of terminology and abbreviations commonly used in QAA literature
- checkpoints or crib sheets of outcomes
- short overview for external examiners, governors and new staff members
- demonstrating how enhancement could be successfully developed for this sector.

Identified areas or topics requesting additional guidance or support

The survey established three main areas where additional guidance and support would be valued.

When analysing the pie chart against the role of the respondents to the survey it can be recognised that these three areas are as expected; quality managers predominantly requested guidance on policy writing while curriculum managers and programme leaders were concerned with programme design, teaching and learning.
The workshops had a greater range of cross-college respondents which was reflected in the areas that additional support was requested:

- demonstrate how to effectively engage and use the student voice as change agents
- effective evidencing of triangulation of the student voice, higher education steering group and committees
- how to raise student awareness of higher education differences in comparison to further education/school - managing student expectations
- demonstrate teaching strategies which integrate research or staff development: particularly for part-time staff of higher education
- guidance to completing Higher Education Review and student submissions
- clarify the difference between further education (including Pearson qualifications) and higher education quality methodologies and review process to inform policies and further staff awareness
- flowchart who has responsibility across their landscape of education provision: for example, franchise requirements, degree-awarding body, work placements
- guide to which information should be available externally on the website and for marketing purposes
- examples of how others have created ‘fit for purpose' processes for their higher education provision taking into account their size and diversity
- exemplify how others have established autonomy in their provision in comparison to usual practices of their degree-awarding body
- exemplars of what is evidence across the indicators and how these have been implemented across the infrastructure to provide a seamless transmission into evidence
- case studies of enhancement opportunities for higher education students
- include access to the previous QAA work-based learning material which was considered valuable
- demonstrate how Chapter B6: Assessment of students and accreditation of prior learning has been evidenced from small providers.

The workshops also identified enabling factors which had furthered cross-college understanding of, and could raise confidence and increase engagement with, the Quality Code.

- creating 'champions' of the Quality Code in the departments, thus ensuring somebody in each area was able to develop strategic processes related to their role which were based on a deeper understanding of the external expectations and could further develop evidence-based outcomes
- all staff training to explore the higher education ethos, the concept of autonomy and how this would impact their job role and individual responsibilities
- increasing communication with degree-awarding bodies through mentoring and sharing knowledge of higher education processes
- furthering awareness of the expectations of the Quality Code and the differentiation of provision for higher education students this may require within a department: in context to the relationship to the degree-awarding body
- additional internal and external training opportunities which correlate activities to the Quality Code and identify methods of evidencing through current planning and evaluation processes
- furthering awareness of QAA online resources, publications and guides.
**Format of the guide**

Preferred access to the guide was predominantly through the website with the generation of a PDF which could be saved or printed for future reference. This would offer individual learning opportunities and was seen as a stepping stone process by which people could access either basic knowledge or further information through links if required.

For the purpose of the development of the guide, respondents of the survey requested the following formats to be included: (recorded in number of requests per format).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Format</th>
<th>Number of Requests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Case studies from providers</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenarios</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAQs</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples of good practice</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Links to other sources of information (QAA/other HE bodies/other)</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The research concluded that the preferred format of the guide was a self-created PDF, accessed online and which contained appropriate information using a variety of techniques, for example case studies, templates or hyperlinks to external and internal sources of information.

The workshops identified key scenarios or activities which the guide could be aimed at to raise awareness of the diversity of solutions and as a platform from which providers could develop their own appropriate process. These would not to be seen as offering prescriptive solutions but raising awareness of how others had successfully identified and autonomously developed an effective methodology. It was recognised that the depth of knowledge required by the user may be variable and how this variable user need could be considered would be discussed further during the development stages of the guide with the advisory group and web designers.
Appendix A - Survey questions

Higher education provision in colleges

1. Name

2. Provider/organisation name

3. What is the primary capacity in which you are responding?
   - Student representative at your university/college
   - Programme leader
   - Course leader
   - Lecturer (with assessment/curriculum planning responsibilities)
   - Lecturer (with no assessment/curriculum planning responsibilities)
   - Careers adviser in school/college
   - Student support officer or related role
   - Quality manager for higher education
   - Quality administrator
   - Admissions manager
   - Research academic
   - Human resources staff development
   - International development officer
   - Teaching and learning manager
   - Marketing Officer
   - Technical or facilities manager
   - Higher education curriculum manager at higher education provider
   - Higher education curriculum manager at college/further education
   - Other higher education senior manager
   - Representative of a professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB)
   - External examiner
   - Other role (please specify)

4. At what times do you refer to the Quality Code?
   - When revalidating higher education qualifications
   - When validating and proposing new higher education qualifications
   - When conducting annual reviews of curriculum
   - During annual planning of staff training
   - During annual departmental planning
   - When planning and implementing the provision of student support
   - During planning of resources and facilities
   - During planning of career services
   - Curriculum planning of formal learning and teaching provision
   - Planning or implementing student enhancement activities
   - During admissions procedures
   - Staff Induction/training
   - Furthering employer engagement
   - When devising a subject specific marketing plan
   - When devising a whole centre marketing plan
   - Other (please specify)
5. To which chapters of the Quality Code do you regularly refer?

- Part A: Setting and maintaining academic standards
- 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 C: Information about higher education provision

6. How confident are you at embedding the Quality Code in planning, evaluation and implementing processes in your college?

- Not very confident
- Confident
- Very confident

7. Please specify three main areas or topics where you would welcome additional guidance or support.

1.

2.

3.

8. What is your preferred format for this guide?

- Online interactive resource
- Printed format – Brochure
- Electronic PDF download from QAA

9. How useful would you consider these features?

(1 not very useful, to 4 very useful)

- Case studies from providers
- Scenarios
- FAQs
- Examples of good practice
- Links to other sources of information (QAA/other HE bodies/other)
- Other (please specify)

10. Do you have any other suggestions for content of the guide?
# Appendix B - Advisory Group members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Affiliation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dr Tim Burton</td>
<td>Assistant Director Standards, Quality and Development</td>
<td>QAA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexandra Day</td>
<td>Director of Adult and Higher Education</td>
<td>Peter Symonds College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Deane</td>
<td>Vice Principal of Higher Education</td>
<td>Hartpury College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally Dixon</td>
<td>Academic Registrar and Higher Education Quality Manager</td>
<td>Grimsby Institute of Further &amp; Higher Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheryl Dunn</td>
<td>Head of Higher Education Quality and Standards</td>
<td>Blackpool and The Fylde College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackie Doddson</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Grwp Llandrillo Menai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teresa Gray</td>
<td>Head of Academic Practice and Development</td>
<td>Plymouth College of Art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Hewlett</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Gloucestershire College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gary Hindmarch</td>
<td>Director of Business Development</td>
<td>South Tyneside College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr John Lea</td>
<td>Assistant Director for Learning and Teaching</td>
<td>Canterbury Christ Church University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craig Best</td>
<td>Further Education Policy and Development Officer (North)</td>
<td>National Union of Students (NUS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan McGregor</td>
<td>Director of Curriculum</td>
<td>Solihull College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dan Murch</td>
<td>Project Officer</td>
<td>QAA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Megan Nichols</td>
<td>Higher Education Quality and Standards Manager</td>
<td>Newcastle College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pauline Osborne</td>
<td>Higher Education Quality and Development Manager</td>
<td>Somerset College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve Poole</td>
<td>Development and Director of Curriculum</td>
<td>Worcester College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diane Rainsbury</td>
<td>Higher Education Registrar</td>
<td>Hull College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonathon Simmons</td>
<td>Leader of the Federation of Further Education Colleges</td>
<td>University of the West of England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brigitte Stockton</td>
<td>Development Officer</td>
<td>QAA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maureen Sydney</td>
<td>Director of Higher Education</td>
<td>Doncaster College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike Williams</td>
<td>Assistant Principal</td>
<td>Coleg Sir Gar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>