



**QAA**

A large graphic composed of several interlocking puzzle pieces. The central piece is a dark grey circle containing the text 'UK Quality Code for Higher Education'. Surrounding it are several other pieces in shades of grey and green, some of which are partially cut off by the edges of the page.

# UK Quality Code for Higher Education

Part B: Assuring and enhancing  
academic quality

Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching

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# Introduction

This Chapter forms part of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code). It will be developed in 2012 and will consider aspects of learning and teaching practice as they relate to academic standards and quality, in all forms of delivery. Until this Chapter is developed in full, the following content supersedes the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning) (2010), Part B: Aspects specific to flexible and distributed learning*, and the *Code of practice, Section 9: Work-based and placement learning (2007)*.

## The Quality Code

The Quality Code is the definitive reference point for all those involved in delivering higher education which leads to an award from or is validated by a UK higher education provider. It makes clear what institutions are required to do, what they can expect of each other, and what the general public can expect of all higher education providers. These Expectations express key matters of principle that the higher education community has identified as important for the assurance of quality and academic standards.

Each Chapter of the Quality Code comprises a series of Indicators which higher education providers have agreed reflect sound practice, and through which institutions can demonstrate that they are meeting the relevant Expectations.

## About this Chapter

Each Indicator has been developed by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (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. Indicators are not designed to be used as a checklist; they are intended to help institutions reflect on and develop their regulations, procedures and practices to demonstrate that the Expectations in the Quality Code are being met.

Each Indicator is numbered and printed in bold and is supported by an explanatory note giving more information about the statement's purpose and context.

# Expectations about learning and teaching

The Quality Code sets out the following Expectation about learning and teaching, which higher education institutions are required to meet.

**Higher education providers implement appropriate strategies for learning and teaching.**

# Section 1: Flexible and distributed learning (FDL)

## Introduction

This section addresses the management of FDL provision in the context both of the awarding institution's students studying remotely, whether or not through a collaborative arrangement with a partner organisation, and of its students registered for study on its own campus. The delivery of an FDL programme of study to a student, the learning support available to the student and the assessment of the student's achievement might be carried out as discrete functions by the awarding institution, a programme presenter and a support provider, as separate bodies, and this section of the Quality Code will make a distinction between delivery, support and assessment functions. Clearly, all these functions might also be carried out by the awarding institution alone, with, for example, an academic department of the institution in the role of both programme presenter and support provider. Even in this situation the terminology of separate functions draws attention to the need for absolute clarity in a student's - and an awarding institution's - understanding of the different dimensions of the learning opportunities offered through FDL.

Where a collaborative arrangement is involved in any part of the FDL programme, reference should be made to *Chapter B10: Management of Collaborative arrangements* of the Quality Code.

## E-learning

Recent developments in learning that uses information and communications technologies (e-learning), have given rise in some quarters to the belief that this approach requires an entirely separate and distinct form of quality assurance. While it is true that some technical aspects of e-modes of learning do require particular ways of meeting specific challenges, it is nonetheless also the case that most of the questions that need to be asked, and answered, about academic management are common to both e-learning and other FDL methods, and may be considered under the headings of delivery, support and assessment. QAA has therefore decided not to prepare separate guidance on the quality assurance of e-learning, but has incorporated into this Chapter of the Quality Code some Indicators and explanations that are the concern of e-learning alone, clearly identifying these instances where they occur in the text. In the case of some entirely technical aspects of the quality assurance of e-learning, reference is made to relevant British Standards Institute publications.

## Flexible and distributed learning

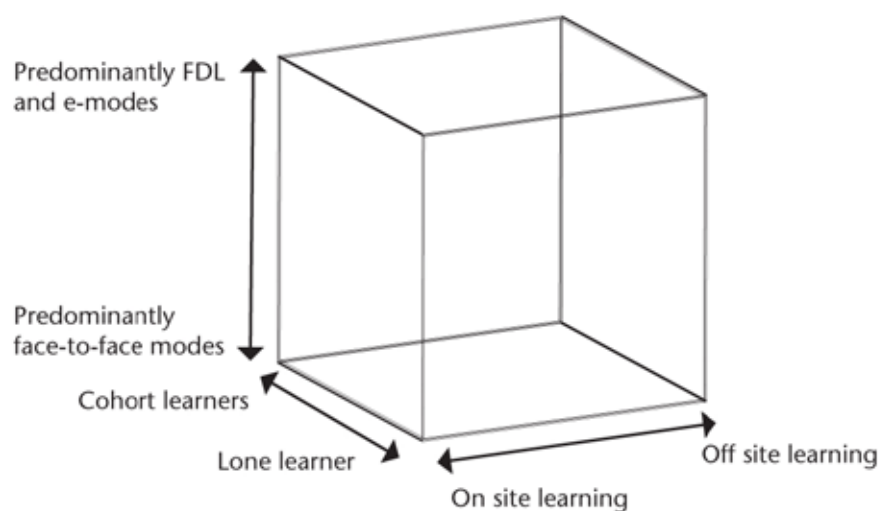
Flexible and distributed learning is used here to characterise approaches to teaching, learning and assessment that:

- do not require a student's place of study to be physically located within the institution (the awarding institution) whose academic award is being sought through successful completion of the programme of study

- do not assume that a student's programme of study is necessarily delivered directly by the awarding institution
- do not assume that a student is necessarily directly supported by staff of the awarding institution
- do not assume that a student is routinely working with other students
- do not necessarily require assessment of a student's achievement to take place at the location of the awarding institution.

### A continuum of arrangements

The variety of approaches represented by FDL in the UK and elsewhere is now considerable, and embraces a continuum of pedagogical opportunities. At one end of this continuum programme delivery, learner support and assessment are all provided directly by staff of the awarding institution at the awarding institution. The other end of this continuum could be represented by an individual distance-learner who may have no direct contact with the awarding institution, its staff or other students, whose programme of study may be delivered through an organisation (the programme presenter) which is not the awarding institution, and whose support for learning may be available from an organisation (the support provider) which is part neither of the programme presenter nor the awarding institution. Between these extremes is a spectrum encompassing various FDL elements as part of on-campus study, and a range of forms of arrangements involving the awarding institution and, perhaps, support-providing and/or collaborating partner organisations. In addition, wherever located, the student might be engaged in learning, support and/or assessment which are ICT or internet based, in which case the learning element of the mode might be referred to as e-mode learning. This suggests that it might be possible to envisage a space within which a student's experience of learning at any one time could be represented as a function of the size of the group of learners, the location of learning and the mode of learning.



These levels of flexibility make it difficult, and not necessarily useful, to structure this component of the Quality Code in a framework that reflects traditional organisational functions. Instead, it is structured from the viewpoint of a student experiencing an FDL programme, supplemented by consideration of the particular responsibilities of the awarding institution in the management of an FDL programme that leads to one of its academic awards. The following is therefore grouped into three separable elements:

- the delivery of an FDL programme of study
- the support of students as learners on that programme
- the security of academic standards of the award and assessment of the achievements of those students.

While the following refers to a programme of study, that is the whole teaching and learning structure that leads to a specific award, a student will frequently experience only elements of a programme - modules or units - approached through FDL methods. Again, readers are reminded that the purpose of this component of the Chapter is to provide a reference which can stimulate questions about academic management, in this case questions about provision that employs elements of FDL among other modes of learning. There is no volume of FDL above which this Chapter of the Quality Code applies and below which it does not. What is important is that consideration has been given to the applicability and relevance of the Indicators to the provision in hand.

## Indicators of sound practice: Flexible and distributed learning

### Equivalence of academic standards

#### Indicator 1

**The academic standards of all awards made under a FDL arrangement should meet the Expectations of the Quality Code.**

The Quality Code provides a set of common reference points that enables comparable academic standards to be established in different higher education institutions, without jeopardising their autonomy and diversity. Explicit use of the Quality Code enables awarding institutions, their students, employers and the general public to have confidence that an award or qualification is of a standard recognised and acceptable within the UK.

The aims, learning outcomes, teaching, learning, and assessment methods of a collaborative programme of study can be described in a programme specification that shows how the programme content relates to relevant subject benchmark statements, and that the award is appropriately located within the relevant framework for higher education qualifications.

Because the awarding institution is a UK institution, and the award a UK award, it is appropriate to make reference to relevant UK subject benchmark statements. There may, however, be cases where the cultural context of an overseas collaboration

requires some divergence from the UK-centred subject benchmark statement and, indeed, cases where points of reference other than UK references legitimately apply to cross-border collaborative arrangements. This may be entirely reasonable, as it might equally be reasonable in a collaboration within the UK, but such divergences can lead to misunderstandings if not explicitly acknowledged and explained. The programme specification provides a ready means for addressing these matters. Guidance on programme specifications is available from QAA.<sup>1</sup>

## Policies, procedures and information

### Indicator 2

**The awarding institution should inform any professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB), which has approved or recognised a programme that is the subject of a possible or actual FDL arrangement, of its proposals and of any final agreements which involve the programme. The status of the programme in respect of PSRB recognition should be made clear to prospective students.**

PSRBs sometimes limit their accreditation, approval or recognition of programmes or awards to particular modes or locations of delivery. On occasion the status of an award or programme delivered away from the awarding institution may not be clear. It is very important that students or applicants are not misled, through accident or design, into thinking that a programme they are applying for, or are already pursuing, is accredited, approved or recognised, when this is not the case. A definitive ruling on this matter can be obtained from the relevant PSRB.

### Indicator 3

**FDL arrangements should be fully costed and should be accounted for accurately and fully.**

The purpose of this Indicator is to remind awarding institutions that financial risks associated with FDL arrangements can be considerable, especially if they provide an important element of an institution's income. It is incumbent on an institution to ensure both that its financial management arrangements are strong enough to manage the risks effectively, and that the financial arrangements themselves do not jeopardise the integrity of the academic standards and quality of the provision or the interests of students.

## Assuring academic standards and the quality of programmes and awards

### Indicator 4

**The scope, coverage and assessment strategy of a FDL programme should be described in a programme specification that refers to relevant subject benchmark statements and the level of award, and that is readily available and comprehensible to stakeholders.**

<sup>1</sup> see Chapter A3: the programme level of the Quality Code

Students, potential students, employers and other stakeholders need to be able to satisfy themselves that awards obtained through FDL arrangements are fully equivalent to other awards offered at a similar level by the same awarding body. To this end, reference via programme specifications to the relevant qualification descriptor and subject benchmark statement will provide useful information and a source of reassurance.

#### Indicator 5

**The awarding institution should ensure that arrangements for admission to the FDL programme take into account the Expectations and Indicators of *Chapter B2: Admissions* of the Quality Code.**

The quality of admission procedures is an important aspect of the overall quality of an institution's academic activities. Collaborative provision arrangements create particular requirements, especially in international contexts. Areas that may require particular care include:

- entry requirements and academic prerequisites
- recognition of foreign qualifications and credits
- arrangements for the accreditation of prior learning and the assessment of prior experiential learning (AP[E]L)
- language proficiency
- information about the status of students in relation to the awarding institution
- cultural assumptions about higher education learning methods.

## Assessment requirements

#### Indicator 6

**The awarding institution is responsible for ensuring that the outcomes of assessment for a programme provided under a FDL arrangement meet the specified academic level of the award as defined in the FHEQ (or SCQF in Scotland), in the context of the relevant subject benchmark statement(s).**

The FHEQ /SCQF, which has been adopted by higher education institutions in the UK, covers all academic provision, wherever and however offered. No distinction is made between provision offered directly by the awarding institution itself, on its own premises, and that offered through FDL arrangements. To make sure that this uniformity is maintained, it is important that the assessment of students is carried out consistently, at the appropriate level for the award being assessed, and with appropriate reference to the FHEQ/SCQF and subject benchmark statements.



## External examining

### Indicator 7

**External examining procedures for programmes offered through FDL arrangements should be consistent with the awarding institution's normal practices.**

The external examiner system is a defining characteristic of UK higher education and an indispensable way of allowing an awarding institution to be sure that its academic standards are both appropriate and being safeguarded. Consistency of application of external examination procedures in FDL arrangements is a central element in maintaining standards and quality in those activities. Any departures from external examiners' normal activity should be thought through very carefully and at the highest level, in advance of their implementation, and accepted only where it is clear that standards and quality will not be jeopardised.

### Indicator 8

**External examiners of FDL programmes must receive briefing and guidance approved by the awarding institution sufficient for them to fulfil their role effectively.**

Awarding institutions need to be satisfied that external examiners know exactly what is required of them and have sufficient expertise and experience to enable them to play their role effectively.

External examiners for FDL activities should be expected to participate in briefing events. The awarding institution should note in particular Indicator 6 of *Chapter B7: External examining* of the Quality Code, which states that 'Institutions ensure that all external examiners they appoint are informed about organisational procedures, practices, and academic regulations, and the crucial value of external examiners' feedback to the institution as part of the broader system of quality assurance and enhancement'.

## Information for students

### Indicator 9

**The minimum level of information that prospective and registered students should have about a FDL programme is the programme specification approved by the awarding institution.**

Confidence in an awarding institution's standards and quality is in great measure dependent on the completeness and accuracy of the information available about them. The programme specification provides a ready way of providing this information. It should also offer prospective and registered students a clear and explicit statement of the nature of the programme and its relationship to national expectations about the academic standards and quality of the subject being studied and the award being sought.

#### **Indicator 10**

**The information made available to prospective students and those registered on a FDL programme should include information to students about the appropriate channels for particular concerns, complaints and appeals, making clear the channels through which they can contact the awarding institution directly.**

Awarding institutions acknowledge different levels of responsibility for students registered on FDL programmes. It is important that all students and prospective students should understand the nature of their formal relationship with their awarding institution. In the case of complaints and appeals, and to avoid confusion and unnecessary dissatisfaction, the awarding institution should ensure that their own responsibilities are clearly distinguished and advertised. See also *Chapter B9: Complaints and appeals* of the Quality Code.

#### **Indicator 11**

**The awarding institution should monitor regularly the information given by the partner organisation or agent to prospective students and those registered on a FDL programme.**

Awarding institutions may find that, despite everyone's best efforts, information for students falls short of what is needed by them. A regular check on the information actually being provided, including user surveys, can help to ensure that it remains accurate, complete and up to date.

## **Publicity and marketing**

#### **Indicator 12**

**The awarding institution should ensure that it has effective control over the accuracy of all public information, publicity and promotional activity relating to its provision offered through FDL arrangements.**

In the competitive world of higher education recruitment, especially in some overseas markets, publicity and marketing assumes great importance. Information designed to attract potential applicants can, on occasion, be over enthusiastic in its desire to establish a competitive advantage. Unsustainable assertions and claims can readily mislead. This is to nobody's benefit as it only causes dissatisfaction and resentment. It can also give a false picture of UK higher education, with adverse consequences for its national and international reputation. Because of this it is important that an awarding institution take responsibility for information about programmes leading to its awards, particularly where the information is published by others on its behalf. The awarding institution should satisfy itself that this control is exercised consistently and fairly and that the public cannot reasonably be misled about the collaborative arrangement or about the nature and standing of the programmes and awards provided under the arrangement.

## Delivery

Indicators 13 and 14 are concerned with aspects of assuring the quality of the programme of study delivered to a student through an FDL arrangement. The Indicators are couched in terms of a student's experience of study through FDL. They do not specify who is responsible for assuring particular aspects of quality of programme delivery. It is the responsibility of the awarding institution to specify the respective responsibilities of the programme presenter, support provider and itself in assuring quality of programme delivery, within the context of the awarding institution retaining ultimate responsibility for quality and standards.

### Indicator 13

Students should have access to:

- documents that set out the respective responsibilities of the awarding institution and the programme presenter for the delivery of an FDL programme or element of study
- descriptions of the component units or modules of an FDL programme or element of study, to show the intended learning outcomes and teaching, learning and assessment methods of the unit or module
- a clear schedule for the delivery of their study materials and for assessment of their work.

Students need information before they start their programme of study to enable them to make appropriate preparations for an FDL approach, and to plan the management of their time. Programme specifications, course handbooks and module or unit guides might usefully contribute to such information, as would a schedule which makes clear the sequencing and other relationships between the whole course structure, and individual modules or units. Students need to know about any scheduled opportunities for support by tutors, and about deadlines for formative and summative assessments.

If information is available in a variety of formats, this will help to avoid students being prevented from accessing it through cost, disability, or lack of equipment (see also Indicator 14).

### Indicator 14

The awarding institution, whether or not working through a programme presenter, should ensure that students can be confident that:

- any FDL programme or element offered for study has had the reliability of its delivery system tested, and that contingency plans would come into operation in the event of the failure of the designed modes of delivery
- the delivery system of an FDL programme or element of study delivered through e-learning methods is fit for its purpose, and has an appropriate availability and life expectancy

- **the delivery of any study materials direct to students remotely through, for example, e-learning methods or correspondence, is secure and reliable, and that there is a means of confirming its safe receipt**
- **study materials, whether delivered through staff of a programme presenter or through web-based or other distribution channels, meet specified expectations of the awarding institution in respect of the quality of teaching and learning support material for a programme or element of study leading to one of its awards**
- **the educational aims and intended learning outcomes of a programme delivered through FDL arrangements are reviewed periodically for their continuing validity and relevance, making reference to the Indicators of Chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review of the Quality Code.**

Delivery systems convey course content, and enable participant interaction and learner support. While they need to be tailored to the environment in which students are expected to work, they also need to take account of the lowest levels of technology available to students and students' special educational needs. The piloting or testing of a delivery system before its operational launch will help the presenter to gain a better understanding of the risks involved, and how to manage those risks. In an e-learning environment, it is the responsibility of the programme presenter to ensure that the system is free from contamination by viruses at the point of delivery, and has password-protected access where appropriate.

Consideration should be given to how alternative forms of delivery would come into action in the event of failure of the principal delivery system, or where students are unable to meet scheduled events. Students should be able to expect that the system would be fail safe. A schedule in advance of the course (see Indicator 13) will, at least, enable students to identify the non-arrival of anticipated materials or events, and access to contact details will enable students to respond quickly to any failure of the principal delivery system.

Students should be able to expect that their FDL study materials are subject to the same rigour of quality assurance as the awarding institution would use for any of its programmes of study.

## Learner support

Indicators 15 to 18 are concerned with aspects of assuring the quality of learner support that is available to a student in an FDL arrangement, whether this is a whole programme or just an element of study. The Indicators are couched in terms of what the student might experience. They do not specify who is responsible for assuring particular aspects of quality of learner support. It is the responsibility of the awarding institution to specify the respective responsibilities of the programme presenter, support provider and itself in assuring quality of programme delivery.

In the case of programmes with elements of support through e-learning, an awarding institution may wish to make such use as it thinks appropriate of *BS8426: A code of practice for e-support in e-learning systems* (BSI, 2003).

**Indicator 15**

**Prospective students should receive a clear and realistic explanation of the expectations placed upon them for study of the FDL programme or elements of study, and for the nature and extent of autonomous, collaborative and supported aspects of learning.**

Prospective students whose only experience of learning is through directed teaching need to be aware of the different challenges and opportunities of autonomous learning, and of their responsibilities as autonomous learners. They need clear guidance on the characteristics of learning required for their FDL studies, and on the general expectation of time commitment that they should be making.

Particularly in an e-learning environment, students may need time to understand and become familiar with technologies that are new to them. They may need some introductory support, possibly involving access to on-line learning environments prior to the start of the course so that equipment and technical access can be tested and new skills practised. Consideration might be given to the need to assign an identified contact prior to the commencement of study to enable the programme presenter to ensure that the student's induction and preparation have been adequate.

**Indicator 16**

**Students should have access to:**

- **a schedule for any learner support available to them through timetabled activities, for example tutorial sessions or web-based conferences**
- **clear and up to date information about the learning support available to them locally and remotely for their FDL programme or elements of study**
- **documents that set out their own responsibilities as learners, and the commitments of the awarding institution and the support provider (if appropriate) for the support of an FDL programme or element of study.**

Academic, technical, or pastoral support to learners in FDL programmes might include face-to-face meetings and/or on-line support. Students need to be well informed about the opportunities available to support their learning. They generally find it helpful if information is specific about such matters as the frequency of such opportunities, and offers guidance on the anticipated response times from those who may be dealing with technical queries. They need to know about particular technical requirements for e-modes of learner support, or particular modes of required or optional attendance, such as residential classes or field trips.

Students should be in a position to appreciate their own responsibilities in terms of responding to requests for information, and for participation in individual or group activities that facilitate learning. They need to know the ground rules and protocols for communication with other students and tutors, and to be in no doubt about which events and activities are compulsory and which are optional.

### **Indicator 17**

**Students should have:**

- **from the outset of their study, an identified contact, either local or remote through email, telephone, fax or post, who can give them constructive feedback on academic performance and authoritative guidance on their academic progression**
- **where appropriate, regular opportunities for inter-learner discussions about the programme, both to facilitate collaborative learning and to provide a basis for facilitating their participation in the quality assurance of the programme**
- **appropriate opportunities to give formal feedback on their experience of the programme.**

Clarity in the arrangements for feedback to students and guidance on their academic performance and progression is particularly important for a student studying under an FDL arrangement where the awarding institution is not also the support provider.

Where it is appropriate, collaborative learning opportunities can provide a strong dimension of student support, whether through scheduled group meetings or through web-based methods. The planning into the programme of study of such inter-learner discussions would be determined by the nature of the programme, its location (on-site or off-site) and its aims and intended outcomes.

Students should always have formal opportunities to feed back on the experience of their programme on a regular basis, and FDL programmes are no exception. Methods might include feedback from local learner support groups, on-line surveys and web conferencing. The methods used should be checked for fitness for purpose, recognising that there may be questions of anonymity with electronic modes which need to be taken into account. It is particularly important in an FDL arrangement, where the awarding institution is not also the programme presenter or support provider, that it is clear who is responsible for processing feedback from students, and who is responsible for telling the students about any action to be taken as a result of their feedback.

### **Indicator 18**

**The awarding institution, whether or not working through a support provider, should be able to ensure that students can be confident that:**

- **staff who provide support to learners on FDL programmes have appropriate skills, and receive appropriate training and development**
- **support for learners, whether delivered through staff of a support provider or through web-based or other distribution channels, meets specified expectations of the awarding institution for the quality of learner support for a programme of study leading to one of its awards.**

The appropriate skills for staff involved in FDL arrangements include both technical competence in the use of the relevant delivery systems and pedagogic expertise in design for delivery, learner support and assessment in FDL. Students on FDL programmes should be able to expect that the staff who design their programmes have relevant technological and pedagogical expertise, and awarding institutions should be able to satisfy themselves that this is the case. Institutions might consider the merits of including aspects relevant to FDL in the development programmes that they provide in teaching and learning for newly-appointed staff, and in opportunities for the continuing professional development of established staff.

Students based on an awarding body's campus can normally expect to have ready access to support services such as pastoral support, academic counselling, library and IT support, and careers guidance. An awarding institution will need to consider how it might make it possible for FDL students to access such services. It needs to be clear to students on FDL programmes which services are available to them from the awarding institution and from the programme presenter or support provider, and which are not. Awarding institutions should note where other sections of the Quality Code refer to the expectation of services being available to its students, for example, as in *Chapter B4: Student support, learning resources and careers education, information and guidance*.

## Assessment of students

Indicators 19 and 20 are concerned with aspects of assuring the security of assessment of students' achievements in programmes of study undertaken through FDL arrangements. They are couched in terms of what students should be able to expect in relation to assessment of academic performance in an FDL programme of element of study.

In the case of programmes with elements of IT-based assessment, an awarding institution may wish to make such use as it thinks appropriate of *BS7988: Code of practice for the use of information technology (IT) in the delivery of assessments* (BSI, 2002), as well as *BS8426, A code of practice for e-support in e-learning systems* (BSI, 2003).

### Indicator 19

Students should have access to:

- **information on the ways in which their achievements will be judged, and the relative weighting of units, modules or elements of the programme in respect of assessment overall**
- **timely formative assessment on their academic performance to provide a basis for individual constructive feedback and guidance, and to illustrate the awarding institution's expectations for summative assessment.**

Information on the methods of assessment used to test achievement of intended learning outcomes would normally be included in the programme specification, but is also likely to be supported by more detailed assessment briefs which are related to the individual units of the programme. Indicators 7 and 8 of *Chapter B6: Assessment of students and accreditation of prior learning* of the Quality Code set out guidance relating to the provision of criteria for the marking and grading of assessments, and for the



rules and regulations for progression, final awards and classifications. The early issue of information on assessment methods, criteria and regulations will assist students following FDL programmes in the planning of their work.

Campus-based students have opportunities for face-to-face communication with staff about academic performance. Students studying remotely through an FDL arrangement may require greater planning of opportunities for formative assessment and appropriate feedback on the outcomes of assessment more generally.

#### Indicator 20

**The awarding institution, whether or not working through a programme presenter or support provider, should ensure that students can be confident that:**

- **their assessed work is properly attributed to them, particularly in cases where the assessment is conducted through remote methods that might be vulnerable to interception or other interference**
- **those with responsibility for assessment are capable of confirming that a student's assessed work is the original work of that student only, particularly in cases where the assessment is conducted through remote methods**
- **any mechanisms, such as web-based methods or correspondence, for the transfer of their work directly to assessors, are secure and reliable, and that there is a means of proving or confirming the safe receipt of their work.**

Where material is sent electronically, staff need to be sure that students have had clear instructions on the format and security measures that they should adopt. Administrative and ICT systems associated with the receipt and recording of assessed work should be demonstrably robust enough to withstand interception or interference.

Awarding institutions need to consider how they can best guard against potential malpractice (including plagiarism) in remote assessment. In some FDL environments, there may be particular issues relating to the authentication of a student's work, especially when assessment is conducted on-line or remotely. In such cases, awarding institutions may wish to refer to the detailed and technical guidance given in *BS7988: Code of practice for the use of information technology (IT) in the delivery of assessments* (BSI, 2002). As a starting point, students should at least be provided with a statement which explains the awarding institution's position on the use of unfair means and the penalties which may ensue, and requires them to confirm acceptance of the terms of that statement.

The methods used to record the receipt of students' assessed work need to be considered from a fitness-for-purpose viewpoint. There should, at least, be a system to permit students to confirm that their assessed work has been received safely and within deadline. Where this system is devolved to a level below that of the programme presenter, for example, to local tutors, the awarding institution should be in a position to be confident that the system is robust. Even so, it might be wise to advise students who have to transfer their assessed work by mail or electronic means to keep a copy of their work.



## Section 2: Work-based and placement learning

### Introduction

This section of *Chapter B3: Learning and teaching* is concerned with arrangements made for identified and agreed learning that typically takes place outside a higher education institution. Work-based or placement learning is usually undertaken as part, and very occasionally the whole, of a programme of study.

Arrangements to provide work-based and placement learning involve a wide range of partners. An awarding institution's relationship with its partner(s) can vary in terms of the nature of the learning opportunities provided. The nature of the relationship may also depend on the partner's purposes for engaging in the provision of work-based learning or placements. For example, an employer that is using work-based learning as a means of improving the skills and knowledge of the workforce may have a different relationship with the awarding institution to an employer providing work-based placements for a full-time student(s).

Such reasonable variations make it difficult to provide a precise and formal definition of the terms work-based and placement learning. It could be argued that the provision of a formal definition might even be counter-productive and act as a constraint to the further development of innovative practice in this area. It is for each institution to decide what it understands by, and how it will use the terms. It is important that each institution ensures that the terms are understood as intended by all of their partners, as well as within their own institution. Institutions may find it useful to draw upon the extensive literature that is available about work-based and placement learning at higher levels.

For the purposes of this publication, however, work-based learning is regarded as learning that is integral to a higher education programme and is usually achieved and demonstrated through engagement with a workplace environment, the assessment of reflective practice and the designation of appropriate learning outcomes. Institutions can draw upon and make use of personal development planning and/or accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL). Work-based learning is often accredited, ranging from a single module within a programme to an entire programme that includes, at its core, activities and learning outcomes designed around the individual's occupation, whether paid or unpaid.

Placement learning is regarded, for the purpose of this publication, as the learning achieved during an agreed and negotiated period of learning that takes place outside the institution at which the full or part-time student is enrolled or engaged in learning. As with work-based learning, the learning outcomes are intended as integral parts of a programme of study. It is important that each student is supported by the institution throughout his/her placement experience, to ensure that specific learning related to the programme can be achieved.

*Chapter B10: Management of collaborative arrangements* of the Quality Code covers general arrangements for provision leading to an award, or to specific credit towards an award of an awarding institution, which is delivered and/or supported and/or assessed through an arrangement with another body (or bodies). Work-based and placement learning have become increasingly important elements of many higher education institutions' activities. They involve particular forms of collaboration and can involve a variety of arrangements, for example between a higher education institution and one or more other bodies, or between a student and a work-based or placement provider. This section of *Chapter B3: Learning and teaching* is intended to provide guidance on these specific aspects of a higher education award and to support such arrangements where they are a pre-determined and integral part of the award, and where their learning outcomes clearly contribute to its overall aims.

There are forms of provision to which the general guidance of *Chapter B10: Management of collaborative arrangements* and the specific guidance of this section might both be relevant. It is for an institution itself to assess the quality assurance needs and risks of such provision in the light of the relevant Indicators in both Chapters of the Quality Code. The object of doing so is to enable the institution to have continuing confidence in the effectiveness of the management of the quality of its provision and the security of the academic standards of its awards.

There is also increasing interest in, and development of, work-based and placement learning that is of demonstrable value in its own right but is, at its outset, not planned as an integral part of a larger programme/award. The underpinning values and expectations regarding provision of such opportunities will be similar but in such instances, it may not be either relevant or possible to demonstrate the potential coherence of such learning within any larger programme of work or higher education award. In these cases, it may subsequently be possible to consider opportunities for aggregation of relevant learning outcomes suitable for (other) higher education awards. *Chapter B1: Programme design and approval* of the Quality Code provides some guidance, although it may be that additional guidance relating to the quality assurance for subsequent aggregation of formally assessed (although not necessarily formally delivered) learning will be required.

Negotiated and agreed periods of placement within a programme have been the dominant form of learning from work-based experience for higher education students for a number of years. Whilst they remain part of many long-standing programmes, current and likely future opportunities will enable students to integrate learning from work and study in a greater variety of, and more flexible, ways. This publication recognises the considerable developments that have taken place in recent years in the opportunities for the integration of work-based and placement learning within higher education programmes and at all levels of higher education.

Increasingly, there are opportunities for individuals in a workplace to negotiate, with an awarding institution or a learning provider, and often their employer, a programme of study developed from their work. There are also more opportunities for full-time students to gain experience and learn through the work environment by undertaking a work placement, and for students to have a period of study overseas. Students involved in this type of learning are likely to have different needs to those on campus full-time.

Higher education institutions are responsible for the quality and coherence of the higher education programmes they offer and the standards of their awards but they may, through formal collaborative arrangements, devolve aspects of the delivery of their programmes to other partners. The range of partners can include, for example, a further education college or another higher education institution (hereafter called the learning provider); an employer or other organisation offering a work-based or placement learning opportunity (referred to in this publication as the work-based or placement provider); or an employer supporting its employee(s) on a higher education programme where the workplace is used as a learning environment. An employer may also be involved in mentoring, supporting and assessing the student. The guidance provided in this publication is intended to support the awarding institution in managing such arrangements. It is expected that awarding bodies will use the guidance provided in this section of the Quality Code on a programme-by-programme basis and in ways that are appropriate to their context.

Work-based or placement learning opportunities can take place outside the UK, through schemes such as Erasmus, as well as language and sandwich courses. Planning these will involve full consideration and due diligence of relevant regulations and policies of the host country, with application of this section of the Quality Code and reflecting the academic and cultural conditions of any host country. This may require careful judgement in the interpretation and application of the Indicators, with regard to, for example, different national and regional contexts, risk assessment, health and safety, and the duty of care to the student and accident reporting. The UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA) provides guidance for institutions on issues related to risk assessment of student activity abroad.

The agreed intended learning outcomes for a work-based or placement learning experience may be highly specific or more general. They may, for example, embrace the demonstration of learning and the development of higher level practical and intellectual skills, such as innovation and enterprise, that are required for professional or other employment, or they may be more general, for example, the development of an understanding of the cultural or employment context of an academic discipline.

Work-based and placement learning, wherever and however organised and delivered, should widen learning opportunities without prejudice either to the academic standard of the award being sought or the quality of what is offered to students. Furthermore, the arrangements for assuring quality and standards should be as rigorous, secure and open to scrutiny as those for programmes provided wholly within the institution and through conventional class-based modes of teaching and learning.

The sharing of good practice in work-based and placement learning, locally and nationally, can be of benefit to all of those involved and contribute towards progressive improvements.

Such sharing can be achieved through the work of a number of organisations.

Other Chapters of the Quality Code, publications by QAA and other organisations involved in work-based or placement learning may be useful references.

# Indicators of sound practice: Work-based and placement learning

## General principles

### Indicator 1

Where work-based or placement learning is part of a programme of study, awarding institutions ensure that its learning outcomes are:

- clearly identified
- contribute to the overall and coherent aims of their programme
- assessed appropriately.

## Intended learning outcomes

Work-based and placement learning is not restricted to undertaking work experience or going on a placement. It is primarily concerned with identifying relevant and appropriately assessed learning, expressed in the form of learning outcomes, which can be linked to that work or placement. Agreeing the intended learning outcomes for a module or programme is an integral part of programme design and is normally the responsibility of the awarding institution, sometimes working with its partners. In agreeing intended learning outcomes, consideration is given to a range of relevant external reference points that are available for the assurance of standards, including *Part A: Setting and maintaining threshold academic standards* of the Quality Code, the requirements of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies, National Occupational Standards, Sector Skills Council Foundation Degree frameworks and other qualifications frameworks.

The means by which learning outcomes can be agreed, and achieved, need to be flexible to accommodate the diversity of students and learning opportunities. Learning outcomes are designed with the overall aims of a programme in mind together with any professional practice-based standards and requirements. Where appropriate, institutions are encouraged to consider including learning outcomes that can be aligned to specific professional practice-based standards and requirements within the work-based or placement learning opportunity, for example, the standards set by the Health Professions Council.

In common with other elements of a programme, it may not be possible for all students in work-based or placement learning situations to have exactly the same learning experiences.

It is important, however, that they all have opportunities to achieve the same learning outcomes, and that support is provided for the student if circumstances change and s/he is no longer able to achieve the outcomes in the agreed setting(s).

Various forms of agreed learning outcomes can contribute to the proper integration of work-based learning into a programme. In identifying the specific learning outcomes for a programme that includes work-based or placement learning, an awarding

institution considers the extent to which that part of the programme contributes to the overall learning outcomes of the programme, and the extent to which the learning is integrated. Such considerations may include:

- whether the learning outcomes of the work-based or placement learning are clear and specifically designed
- whether the student has had adequate/appropriate opportunities to achieve the intended learning outcomes during the work-based or placement learning
- what impact an optional or compulsory work-based or placement learning component has on the intended learning outcomes of the programme as a whole.

Many awarding institutions assign a credit value to sets of learning outcomes, including those linked to work-based and placement learning. The credit value indicates both how much (the amount) learning is expected and how hard (the relative level of difficulty) it is. The allocation of credit to sets of learning outcomes and its award to students for achieving those outcomes is covered by an institution's quality assurance procedures.

## Assessment

All types of learning, including work-based and placement learning, must be appropriately and formally assessed if they are to be formally recognised. Awarding institutions, normally in consultation with their partners, determine the type(s) and frequency of student assessment in work-based and placement learning. It is important that the assessments are designed to test whether the particular agreed learning outcomes have been achieved.

Assessment strategies that include an emphasis on supporting student learning, as well as measuring achievement of academic standards, can improve students' learning experience. Well-designed assessment can help to reinforce the relevance of the work-based or placement learning to other parts of the programme and vice versa, and give students a range of opportunities to demonstrate achievement of their learning. In designing assessment for contexts where the learning and/or the assessment takes place off campus, it is important that any assessment tests the intended learning outcomes both accurately and fairly.

It is important that the impact of failure or non-completion of any work-based or placement learning on progression within an overall programme, and the provision of reassessment opportunities, are considered when developing the assessment strategy.

External examiners play an important part in assuring the standards of awards and the quality of learning opportunities, including those appropriate to work-based or placement learning. The commentary provided by the external examiner on the work-based or placement learning elements of a programme makes an important contribution to assuring the standards of the programme. Awarding institutions and partners may wish to refer *Chapter B7: External examining* of the Quality Code.

It may also be agreed that employers may have a designated role in the assessment of the student's work-based or placement learning, but it is important that all of those involved in the formal assessment of students are competent to fulfil their roles and understand their responsibilities. Training provided by the awarding institution can

help to ensure that this role is carried out effectively. It may be important, therefore, to ensure that standard institutional practices take account of the particular requirements of those awards that include work-based or placement learning and that the awarding institution has oversight of all those who are involved in such assessment, including the moderation of assessment and the participation of assessors in decisions about credit and awards.

Students, in particular those in current or recent employment, can bring a range of experience and knowledge to their studies. Where that experience and knowledge matches identified learning outcomes, awarding institutions may wish to consider the extent to which APEL may be applicable. Reference to *Chapter B6: Assessment of students and accreditation of prior learning* of the Quality Code may be helpful here.

*Chapter B10: Management of collaborative arrangements*, *Chapter A6: Assessment of achievement of learning outcomes*, and the first part of this Chapter should also be consulted in relation to this Indicator.

## Responsibilities

### Responsibilities for academic standards and quality

#### Indicator 2

**Awarding institutions are responsible for the academic standards of their awards and the quality of provision leading to them, and have in place policies and procedures to ensure that their responsibilities, and those of their partners involved in work-based and placement learning, are clearly identified and met.**

The design of higher education programmes that include work-based or placement learning can involve a number of partners in addition to the awarding institution. However, the academic standards of a higher education award and assuring the quality of student learning opportunities are the sole responsibility of the awarding institution.

An awarding institution may delegate responsibility for aspects of a programme, where it has confidence that a partner, such as a learning provider or employer, has the capacity to accept and discharge that responsibility. Employers are often involved in jointly supporting students' work-based or placement learning. Such shared responsibilities can work well so long as there is clarity about who is responsible for what. An awarding institution, together with its partner(s), may consider how devolved or shared responsibilities can be organised and clearly identified. This may be achieved through, for example: memoranda of understanding; service level agreements; the provision of handbooks for students, employers, providers and staff; and learning contracts. Clarity about responsibilities is important as the student learning is usually taking place away from the premises of the learning provider. It is particularly important when organising work-based or placement opportunities overseas.

*Chapter B10: Management of collaborative arrangements*, and the first part of this Chapter relating to flexible and distributed learning, are also relevant references for this Indicator.

Clearly defined policies and procedures for securing, approving and/or allocating work-based or placement learning help an awarding institution ensure that, where applicable, any partner providing a learning opportunity can deliver these



appropriately and has the capacity and capability to assist students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

In providing a work-based or placement opportunity abroad, awarding institutions and their partners should take account of relevant legislation appropriate to the country where the opportunity is being undertaken, to ensure that they can meet their duty of care towards the student. Guidance provided by UKCISA may be helpful.

Sometimes, however, the work environment may not provide the appropriate learning opportunity, for example, where a student is using his/her existing workplace principally as the site for their work-based learning but the employer is not aware of this nor willing to be involved. In such circumstances, the awarding institution will need to consider, maybe at the stage of admission to the programme, the suitability of the activity in terms of whether learning outcomes can be successfully demonstrated, and how the student is going to be supported.

Successful achievement of work-based or placement learning generally depends on the full commitment of all partners. It is, however, sometimes necessary for one or more of the partners to terminate an arrangement. Awarding institutions need to have policies and procedures in place to cover such eventualities. These include the provision of guidance and support for the student in such circumstances, and identification of how the student will be able to continue with their programme of study and have the opportunity to demonstrate the required learning outcomes. Such policies and procedures should be agreed at the outset of any partnership providing work-based and placement learning opportunities.

### Responsibilities of partners

#### Indicator 3

**Awarding institutions ensure that all partners providing work-based and placement learning opportunities are fully aware of their related and specific responsibilities, and that the learning opportunities provided by them are appropriate.**

Partnerships that provide work-based or placement learning opportunities for students can be structured in various ways.

An awarding institution sets out how it expects the responsibilities associated with each work-based or placement learning experience to be undertaken and achieved. A memorandum of understanding or other types of formal agreement can assure the awarding institution that the work-based or placement provider understands, agrees to and is able to demonstrate its ability to fulfil its responsibilities under relevant legislation. Such an agreement will take into account the level of skill and experience of the student and where the opportunity takes place, particularly if the opportunity is overseas. It should in all cases be clear and understood by all partners where responsibility lies for, among other things, the provision of appropriate learning opportunities, the health and safety of students, and, where delegated by the awarding institution, any assessment of students. A risk assessment can provide the assurance that the awarding institution needs prior to agreeing the work-based or placement learning opportunity.

The nature of the work-based or placement setting, and the student's employment status with the partner, may have a bearing on the applicable legislation and whether the awarding institution or the partner(s) is identified as the responsible authority. Awarding institutions are responsible for identifying and clarifying these responsibilities and duties with their partners and seeking legal advice if appropriate.

### **Responsibilities and entitlements of students**

#### **Indicator 4**

**Awarding institutions inform students of their specific responsibilities and entitlements relating to their work-based and placement learning.**

Students undertaking work-based or placement learning have entitlements as individuals, as well as obligations and responsibilities towards the awarding institution, learning provider, and to others such as customers, clients, service users, other employees and the general public. Students have a responsibility to meet the norms and expectations for professional conduct in the particular field of work or study that they are undertaking through the work-based or placement learning including those students who are on an overseas placement. For example, students on health-related practice must conduct themselves and practice within an ethical framework. For those students using their existing workplace for their work-based learning, such norms, expectations and responsibilities are often covered in an employment contract and may be more obvious than for students joining a workplace to undertake a placement.

It is helpful for students if these norms, responsibilities and expectations are clearly stated and understood at the outset of the work-based or placement learning opportunity. Students should be made aware of their entitlements to, for example, work in a safe environment and to be treated in accordance with applicable legislation, as well as being fully informed of their responsibilities, including those under statutory legislation covering, for example, the need for client or patient confidentiality, intellectual property rights and data protection.

Awarding institutions can provide students with a range of information on their entitlements and responsibilities, including the conduct expected of the student by the institution, the level of student autonomy, and the nature and scope of learning support available from the awarding institution and its partner(s) at different times before, during and after the work-based or placement learning opportunity.

It is likely that during the work-based or placement learning, students will take on the responsibility for managing their own learning and professional relationships, and for tracking and recording their own progress and achievements. To help in the process of managing their own learning, students may consider personal development planning and learning logs, which may ideally have already been started, under guidance in the institution. To support this, learning agreements can be developed prior to the work-based or placement opportunity.

It is important that the partners involved in the work-based or placement learning agree how they will provide each other with an early warning of potential problems that may prevent students' progress or satisfactory completion of their learning outcomes. Students should be informed of the procedures that they should follow and whom they should contact if problems occur.



## Information, support and guidance

### Students

#### Indicator 5

**Awarding institutions provide students with appropriate and timely information, support and guidance prior to, throughout and following their work-based and placement learning.**

There is a wide range of information, support and guidance on work-based or placement learning opportunities that can be selected according to both the nature and type(s) of opportunities being provided and the students involved. All students, whether full or part-time, undertaking distance learning or on an overseas placement, benefit from having information about the level and amount of guidance and support available to them, how they can access it, who will be providing it, the frequency that such support may be available and who to contact in the case of an emergency.

Support and guidance can be both academic and/or personal. Academic support can include guidance on academic performance. Personal support may include technical support, counselling and careers advice and, for overseas placement students, advice on the culture of the overseas location, on finding accommodation, insurance and travel information. Students can also be provided with information about the rights to intellectual property developed during a work-based or placement opportunity and whether or not this is covered by a contract of employment.

Information, support and guidance materials developed in consultation with partners are more likely to fulfil the students' needs, reduce duplication and ensure that appropriate, consistent and timely information is available to students at all stages of their work-based or placement opportunity. Similarly, how support and guidance will be provided can be discussed and agreed between the awarding institution and any partners. The needs of students differ depending on whether they are yet to begin the work-based or placement learning, are undertaking it, or have completed it. For example, full or part-time students returning to complete their programme after a placement learning opportunity or an overseas placement may appreciate support to ensure that their experience is integrated into the programme, and how their reflections on their experience can be used for future students undertaking the same placement learning opportunity.

Students may also benefit from having information provided by the awarding institution about the procedures they should follow if they have a problem or complaint about their work-based learning or placement. *Chapter B9: Complaints and appeals* of the Quality Code can provide further guidance on issues that should be considered.

### Partners

#### Indicator 6

**Awarding institutions ensure that work-based and placement learning partners are provided with appropriate and timely information prior to, throughout and following the students' work-based and placement learning.**

The amount, range, format and timing of information and guidance an awarding institution provides to its work-based or placement providers is important.

Work-based or placement providers are encouraged to play an active role in the opportunities provided for the student. To support them in this role they need clear information from the awarding institution about the objectives of the work-based or placement learning, their particular roles and responsibilities, the nature and scope of the activity involved and how responsibilities are to be fulfilled. They will benefit from guidance about their involvement in the procedures for the monitoring of the progress of students and mechanisms for reporting to the awarding institution at the end of the work-based or placement learning opportunity.

A work-based or placement provider may be involved in providing a mentoring or supervising role. The responsibilities of these important roles need to be clearly identified and any training for the mentor or supervisor provided before the student begins the opportunity.

It is good practice for an awarding institution to inform the work-based or placement provider about visits from the academic or support staff, and any change(s) in the student's circumstances, in advance of the experience commencing.

Work-based or placement providers find it helpful to have clear information about action to be taken if they are no longer able to offer a work-based or placement learning opportunity or if they have any kind of problem or complaint concerning the conduct of the student.

### **Staff development**

#### **Indicator 7**

**Awarding institutions ensure that:**

- **their staff involved in work-based and placement learning are appropriately qualified, resourced and competent to fulfil their role(s)**
- **where applicable, other educational providers, work-based and placement learning partners have effective measures in place to monitor and assure the proficiency of their staff involved in the support of the relevant work-based and placement learning.**

The level and mix of staff expertise required to identify, develop, maintain, monitor and evaluate an awarding institution's work-based or placement learning policies and procedures are important. In considering such factors, awarding institutions need to have a strategy for how their staff will be appropriately appointed, trained and supported to undertake the role. Such assurance can be extended to include confidence that partner(s) strategies are appropriate to assure the proficiency of its own staff and that necessary staff development needs are provided for.

Staff of the awarding institution, other learning providers, and those employed in the work-based or placement learning setting, all have crucial roles in identifying, developing and maintaining appropriate learning opportunities and supporting students. They need to be informed about the awarding institution's policies and procedures for assuring the quality of learning intended to be derived from the experience.

In some circumstances, for example in nursing and midwifery, there is a requirement that students are supported in their practice learning by those who are appropriately qualified. It is therefore important that these requirements are satisfied before the student commences any practice placement.

All staff associated with supporting students during the work-based or placement learning work better if they have clearly and explicitly defined roles, and are given appropriate training to undertake these effectively. Such training may include updating staff knowledge and understanding of relevant legislation, institutional policies and practices.

### **Monitoring and evaluation**

#### **Indicator 8**

**Awarding institutions have policies and procedures for securing, monitoring, administering and reviewing work-based and placement learning that are effective and reviewed regularly.**

Work-based and placement learning opportunities can be dynamic and flexible, and contribute significantly to a student's learning experience, the programmes offered by the awarding institution, and the activities of the work-based or placement provider. Regular and effective monitoring and review of such opportunities helps all involved to gain maximum benefit from them, contribute towards enhancement, inform future developments and contribute to the improvement of future relationships between partners.

Clear procedures which allow feedback on the quality and standards of the work-based or placement learning to be available to and used by all partners enable institutions and work-based learning or placement providers to identify and take appropriate and timely action, where necessary, and provide opportunities to note effective practices.

Such feedback may be obtained from providers in a number of ways. These can include, for example, regular meetings between the awarding institution and any learning providers, the employer representative(s), and the student, as well as questionnaires and focus groups which can be used to gain the views of all those involved. Discussion to agree the most effective and appropriate methods of obtaining and providing feedback is likely to be most effective if undertaken at the beginning of any new work-based or placement agreement, and these methods should be periodically reviewed.

Feedback from institutional staff engaged with work-based and placement learning, and also from supervisors/mentors, external examiners and students is valuable in monitoring and reviewing both the effectiveness of the institution's policies and procedures for work-based or placement learning, and also about the quality and standards of its provision.

## Further information and additional references

References are given here to material which higher education providers may find useful in relation to the topic of the Chapter. They do not form part of the Quality Code, but as each Chapter is developed by an expert advisory group, the status of these materials (and others not listed) may be reconsidered, and the views of the higher education sector more broadly sought through public consultation. Additional references may also be added: this is not intended to be a comprehensive resource.

Personal development planning: guidelines for institutional policy and practice in higher education

[www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Personal-development-planning-guidance-for-institutional-policy-and-practice-in-higher-education.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Personal-development-planning-guidance-for-institutional-policy-and-practice-in-higher-education.aspx)

Explaining contact hours: Guidance for institutions providing public information about higher education in the UK

[www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/contact-hours.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/contact-hours.aspx)

# Appendix 1: The Indicators

## Expectations about learning and teaching

The Quality Code sets out the following Expectation about learning and teaching, which higher education institutions are required to meet.

**Higher education providers implement appropriate strategies for learning and teaching.**

## Indicators of sound practice: Flexible and distributed learning

### Indicator 1

The academic standards of all awards made under a FDL arrangement should meet the Expectations of the Quality Code.

### Indicator 2

The awarding institution should inform any professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB), which has approved or recognised a programme that is the subject of a possible or actual FDL arrangement, of its proposals and of any final agreements which involve the programme. The status of the programme in respect of PSRB recognition should be made clear to prospective students.

### Indicator 3

FDL arrangements should be fully costed and should be accounted for accurately and fully.

### Indicator 4

The scope, coverage and assessment strategy of a FDL programme should be described in a programme specification that refers to relevant subject benchmark statements and the level of award, and that is readily available and comprehensible to stakeholders.

### Indicator 5

The awarding institution should ensure that arrangements for admission to the FDL programme take into account the Expectations and Indicators of *Chapter B2: Admissions* of the Quality Code.

### Indicator 6

The awarding institution is responsible for ensuring that the outcomes of assessment for a programme provided under a FDL arrangement meet the specified academic level of the award as defined in the FHEQ (or SCQF in Scotland), in the context of the relevant subject benchmark statement(s).

**Indicator 7**

External examining procedures for programmes offered through FDL arrangements should be consistent with the awarding institution's normal practices.

**Indicator 8**

External examiners of FDL programmes must receive briefing and guidance approved by the awarding institution sufficient for them to fulfil their role effectively.

**Indicator 9**

The minimum level of information that prospective and registered students should have about a FDL programme is the programme specification approved by the awarding institution.

**Indicator 10**

The information made available to prospective students and those registered on a FDL programme should include information to students about the appropriate channels for particular concerns, complaints and appeals, making clear the channels through which they can contact the awarding institution directly.

**Indicator 11**

The awarding institution should monitor regularly the information given by the partner organisation or agent to prospective students and those registered on a FDL programme.

**Indicator 12**

The awarding institution should ensure that it has effective control over the accuracy of all public information, publicity and promotional activity relating to its provision offered through FDL arrangements.

**Indicator 13**

Students should have access to:

- documents that set out the respective responsibilities of the awarding institution and the programme presenter for the delivery of an FDL programme or element of study
- descriptions of the component units or modules of an FDL programme or element of study, to show the intended learning outcomes and teaching, learning and assessment methods of the unit or module
- a clear schedule for the delivery of their study materials and for assessment of their work.

**Indicator 14**

The awarding institution, whether or not working through a programme presenter, should ensure that students can be confident that:

- any FDL programme or element offered for study has had the reliability of its delivery system tested, and that contingency plans would come into operation in the event of the failure of the designed modes of delivery

- the delivery system of an FDL programme or element of study delivered through e-learning methods is fit for its purpose, and has an appropriate availability and life expectancy
- the delivery of any study materials direct to students remotely through, for example, e-learning methods or correspondence, is secure and reliable, and that there is a means of confirming its safe receipt
- study materials, whether delivered through staff of a programme presenter or through web-based or other distribution channels, meet specified expectations of the awarding institution in respect of the quality of teaching and learning support material for a programme or element of study leading to one of its awards
- the educational aims and intended learning outcomes of a programme delivered through FDL arrangements are reviewed periodically for their continuing validity and relevance, making reference to the Indicators of *Chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review* of the Quality Code.

#### **Indicator 15**

Prospective students should receive a clear and realistic explanation of the expectations placed upon them for study of the FDL programme or elements of study, and for the nature and extent of autonomous, collaborative and supported aspects of learning.

#### **Indicator 16**

Students should have access to:

- a schedule for any learner support available to them through timetabled activities, for example tutorial sessions or web-based conferences
- clear and up to date information about the learning support available to them locally and remotely for their FDL programme or elements of study
- documents that set out their own responsibilities as learners, and the commitments of the awarding institution and the support provider (if appropriate) for the support of an FDL programme or element of study.

#### **Indicator 17**

Students should have:

- from the outset of their study, an identified contact, either local or remote through email, telephone, fax or post, who can give them constructive feedback on academic performance and authoritative guidance on their academic progression
- where appropriate, regular opportunities for inter-learner discussions about the programme, both to facilitate collaborative learning and to provide a basis for facilitating their participation in the quality assurance of the programme
- appropriate opportunities to give formal feedback on their experience of the programme.

### Indicator 18

The awarding institution, whether or not working through a support provider, should be able to ensure that students can be confident that:

- staff who provide support to learners on FDL programmes have appropriate skills, and receive appropriate training and development
- support for learners, whether delivered through staff of a support provider or through web-based or other distribution channels, meets specified expectations of the awarding institution for the quality of learner support for a programme of study leading to one of its awards.

### Indicator 19

Students should have access to:

- information on the ways in which their achievements will be judged, and the relative weighting of units, modules or elements of the programme in respect of assessment overall
- timely formative assessment on their academic performance to provide a basis for individual constructive feedback and guidance, and to illustrate the awarding institution's expectations for summative assessment.

### Indicator 20

The awarding institution, whether or not working through a programme presenter or support provider, should ensure that students can be confident that:

- their assessed work is properly attributed to them, particularly in cases where the assessment is conducted through remote methods that might be vulnerable to interception or other interference
- those with responsibility for assessment are capable of confirming that a student's assessed work is the original work of that student only, particularly in cases where the assessment is conducted through remote methods
- any mechanisms, such as web-based methods or correspondence, for the transfer of their work directly to assessors, are secure and reliable, and that there is a means of proving or confirming the safe receipt of their work.

## Indicators of sound practice: Work-based and placement learning

### Indicator 1

Where work-based or placement learning is part of a programme of study, awarding institutions ensure that its learning outcomes are:

- clearly identified
- contribute to the overall and coherent aims of their programme
- assessed appropriately.



### **Indicator 2**

Awarding institutions are responsible for the academic standards of their awards and the quality of provision leading to them, and have in place policies and procedures to ensure that their responsibilities, and those of their partners involved in work-based and placement learning, are clearly identified and met.

### **Indicator 3**

Awarding institutions ensure that all partners providing work-based and placement learning opportunities are fully aware of their related and specific responsibilities, and that the learning opportunities provided by them are appropriate.

### **Indicator 4**

Awarding institutions inform students of their specific responsibilities and entitlements relating to their work-based and placement learning.

### **Indicator 5**

Awarding institutions provide students with appropriate and timely information, support and guidance prior to, throughout and following their work-based and placement learning.

### **Indicator 6**

Awarding institutions ensure that work-based and placement learning partners are provided with appropriate and timely information prior to, throughout and following the students' work-based and placement learning.

### **Indicator 7**

Awarding institutions ensure that:

- their staff involved in work-based and placement learning are appropriately qualified, resourced and competent to fulfil their role(s)
- where applicable, other educational providers, work-based and placement learning partners have effective measures in place to monitor and assure the proficiency of their staff involved in the support of the relevant work-based and placement learning.

### **Indicator 8**

Awarding institutions have policies and procedures for securing, monitoring, administering and reviewing work-based and placement learning that are effective and reviewed regularly.

## Appendix 2: Glossary of terms

In the vocabulary of FDL arrangements, many words are given different meanings or are used in different ways by different institutions and in different countries. This is a source of actual and potential confusion. It is important that readers of this Chapter of the Quality Code should be aware of the way in which its compilers have chosen to use words relevant to FDL arrangements. As an aid to clarity for readers of this Chapter of the Quality Code, a glossary of terms is given below. The glossary is here to provide descriptions: it does not imply endorsement, approval, or disapproval by QAA of any of the functions, processes or arrangements that are described in the glossary.

**Award** is any UK higher education award or qualification as defined by the *Framework for higher education qualifications* (FHEQ) for England, Wales and Northern Ireland, or for Scotland.

**Awarding institution** is a university or other higher education institution empowered to award degrees, diplomas, certificates or credits by virtue of authority given to it by statute, Royal Charter, or the Privy Council, or under licence from another authorised body. It is the UK institution whose academic award is the award to which a programme of study leads.

**Delivery system** refers to the means by which instruction and information is provided to a student on an FDL programme. It may be people-based, paper-based, web-based, or based on media such as audio or video links or recordings. Many FDL programmes employ a mixture of methods, each selected on the basis of being appropriate for its purpose. There is advantage in considering a back-up system for cases where the principal delivery system might be sensitive to failure of equipment or public services.

**Framework for higher education qualifications** (the FHEQ) for institutions in England, Wales and Northern Ireland sets out the descriptors of the five levels of higher education qualifications awarded by universities and colleges in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The FHEQ for institutions in Scotland sets out the six levels of higher education qualifications awarded by universities and colleges in Scotland; this is part of the wider *Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)*. Qualification descriptors in both consist of a statement of the outcomes and achievements that a student should be able to demonstrate for the qualification to be awarded, and a statement of the wider abilities that the typical student could be expected to have developed in the process of attaining that award.

**Level** is a broad indicator of the relative demand, complexity, depth of study and autonomy of learning associated with a particular award. Descriptions of the levels of UK higher education awards are given in the *FHEQ* and the *SCQF*.

**Programme** (of study) is the approved curriculum followed by a registered student. A programme may be multidisciplinary, or refer to the main pathways through a modular scheme. In this Chapter of the Quality Code it is used to mean the academic provision which is the subject of a FDL arrangement. The provision might be only part of a full programme, in which case it is referred to in this Chapter of the Quality Code as an element of the programme of study.

**Professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs)** is used to denote organisations which are authorised to accredit, approve or recognise specific programmes in the context of the requirements for professional qualification. Some such organisations have a prescribed statutory or regulatory responsibility to accredit, approve or recognise programmes and/or to determine the academic standards and professional or vocational components of such programmes.

**Programme specifications** provide concise published statements about the intended learning outcomes of programmes of study, information about the teaching, learning, learning support and assessment methods used to enable the learning outcomes to be achieved and demonstrated, and show how the units of study that make up the programmes will relate to levels of achievement.

**Quality assurance** is the means through which an institution ensures and confirms that the conditions are in place for students to achieve the standards set by it or by another awarding body.

**Support provider** is the term used to indicate the organisation, group or person(s) charged with providing learner support to students of a programme. Learner support may be provided directly by the awarding institution or by the programme presenter, but learner support could also be made available to students through a separate support provider, particularly in the form of local support for students remote from the awarding institution and programme presenter.

**The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education**

Southgate House

Southgate Street

Gloucester

GL1 1UB

Tel 01452 557000

Fax 01452 557070

Email [comms@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:comms@qaa.ac.uk)

Web [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)

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