



UK Quality Code for Higher Education

Part C: Information about higher education provision

**Draft for consultation
December 2011**

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Introduction

The following reference point for providers of UK higher education has been developed specifically for the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code). Part C: Information about higher education provision draws on aspects of the former *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of Practice)* and makes reference throughout to other Parts and Chapters of the Quality Code as appropriate.

The Quality Code

The Quality Code is the definitive reference point for all those involved in providing 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. Higher education providers are required to meet the Expectations. The manner in which they do so is the responsibility of the providers.

Each Chapter¹ of the Quality Code comprises a series of Indicators which higher education providers have agreed reflect sound practice, and through which providers can demonstrate that they are meeting the relevant Expectations. The *General introduction* to the Quality Code provides a technical introduction for users of the Quality Code, including guidance concerning the terminology used throughout the Quality Code, and should be considered in conjunction with this document.

About Part C: Information about higher education provision

Part C: Information about higher education provision 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 (NUS); professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs); and other interested parties. It sets out the Expectation that all UK higher education providers are required to meet concerning the information they produce about the higher education they offer. A series of Indicators offers guidance to providers in meeting the Expectation. Indicators are not designed to be used as a checklist; they are intended to help providers reflect on and develop their regulations, procedures and practices to demonstrate that they are meeting the Expectation of Part C.

Part C reflects the higher education community's shared view that it is important to maintain public confidence in the value of higher education. One of the ways in which such confidence can be promoted is by higher education providers giving appropriate information to a range of stakeholders about the higher education experience they offer. The public also need to have confidence in the soundness of the mechanisms higher education providers use to safeguard academic standards and to assure and enhance academic quality.

Part C is designed to ensure that the information that providers give about higher education is as consistent, accessible and appropriate as possible across all UK higher education providers, taking into account their autonomy and differences in their mission, size, organisational

¹ All Chapters of the Quality Code are available on the QAA website, at: www.qaa.ac.uk/AssuringStandardsAndQuality/quality-code/Pages/default.aspx

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structures and range of provision. The Indicators and explanatory notes emphasise and demonstrate that the Expectation can be met by all providers who subscribe to the general principles that underpin Part C, regardless of the administrative requirements of the national framework in which they operate within the UK. Therefore, while the following recognises that the provision of information is an act of communication in its own right, it is concerned with the content of information produced by higher education providers in terms of its usefulness, validity, reliability and accessibility. The Expectation and Indicators below are not concerned with the specific mechanisms used by providers to communicate them.

Each Indicator is numbered and printed in bold, and is supported by an explanatory note which gives more information about its purpose and context.

Information about UK higher education

Providers of UK higher education produce information about higher education for a variety of stakeholders and for different purposes. In the case of higher education delivered through collaborative partnerships, the responsibilities of partner providers concerning information about higher education provision will be set out in the agreement with their awarding bodies. Stakeholders' confidence in the academic standards and quality of higher education provision hinges upon the validity and reliability of such information. Higher education providers target varying audiences who use the information for their own specific purposes, and set their own priorities concerning where to seek, how to choose and use, and when to look for the information they require.

Part C: Information about higher education provision is structured around the following purposes for which higher education providers produce information, including to:

- communicate the value of higher education
- enable prospective students to make informed decisions about where, what and how they will study
- enable current students to make the most of their higher education learning experience
- confirm the achievements of students on completion of their studies
- safeguard academic standards and assure and enhance academic quality.

Given these purposes, it is plausible that not all information about higher education should be in the public domain, but is on occasion signposted in a targeted fashion.

Providers' responsibilities for making sure that target audiences understand the information they are given is addressed in detail in the relevant Chapters of Part B: Assuring and enhancing academic quality of the Quality Code.

General principles

The following general principles apply to giving information about higher education provision.

Principle 1: Higher education, its processes and its values should be comprehensible to the general public, students, and other stakeholders. Information about higher education, produced by higher education providers, should therefore be clear, fit for purpose, and mindful of the diversity of audiences. Consequently, information about higher education should be accessible

and retrievable where all audiences and information users can reasonably expect to find it. The format and delivery of the information takes account of the requirements for equality of access.

Principle 2: Higher education providers have responsibility and accountability for the information they produce about the higher education experience they offer. At the same time, providers have autonomy regarding the mechanisms they use to communicate this information.

Principle 3: Information should be timely, and proportionate to audiences' requirements.

Principle 4: Information produced by higher education providers should offer a fair reflection of the higher education experience the provider offers.

The above principles are embodied in the Expectation set out below.

Consultation question 1:

Do you agree with the principles and their applicability to all providers of UK higher education? Please offer alternative phrasing and comments if you do not agree. Do the Expectation and Indicators embody the principles?

Expectation about information about higher education provision

The Quality Code sets out the following Expectation concerning information about higher education provision, which providers of higher education are required to meet.

UK higher education providers produce information about the higher education experience they offer that is valid, reliable, useful and accessible.

Consultation question 2:

Do you agree with the wording of the Expectation for Part C: Information about higher education provision? Does the Expectation adequately reflect the principles outlined above? Please offer alternative phrasing and comments if you do not agree.

Indicators of sound practice

Information about the higher education provider

The Indicators in this section of Part C: Information about higher education provision concern the higher level of information that is of interest to the wider group of stakeholders in higher education. In addition to students and their advisers and supporters, politicians, the media, employers, and members of the general public may wish to access information that describes the nature of the higher education provider, and its role within an increasingly diverse sector. Many higher education providers are subject to the Freedom of Information Act and related regulations and, as such, will have publication schemes. However, the Indicators are intended to cover all providers, and to apply to the mechanisms used to make appropriate information available.

Indicator 1

Higher education providers publish information that describes their role within the UK higher education sector.

Higher education providers make available information at organisational level that describes their mission, values and overall strategy. This information is sufficiently comprehensive to enable audiences and stakeholders to develop an understanding of the profile of the provider, and the role and position the provider occupies within the context of UK higher education. Such information includes the description of governance arrangements, corporate and strategic plans, and annual reports. Information is given about the student population, about the different modes of study that are supported, and about the programmes and awards.

Information is also given about the higher education programmes the provider offers, including those that are delivered through collaborative arrangements or agencies. Current details about the provider's collaborative partnerships, for example with awarding and non-awarding bodies, other education providers, employers, or international partners, are included. *Chapter B10: Management of collaborative arrangements* gives more detail about this.

Information is made available in a variety of formats, which suit both the provider's and the audiences' needs and purposes.

Indicator 2

Higher education providers publicise institutional policies and procedures that are relevant and of interest to all audiences.

Not all of a provider's policies and procedures are of interest to all audiences, and many will be relevant only to students while on their programme of study. However, information about some policies' purposes and function may be of interest to a wider audience. Policies concerning information and data are made available and give a clear indication of and guidance about information the provider makes publicly available.

Relevant references and guidelines concerning information higher education providers give about themselves:

- Freedom of Information Act 2000: www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/36/contents
- Data Protection Act 1998: www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/29/contents
- Equality Act 2010: www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents
- CUC (2004) CUC Guide for Members of Higher Education Governing Bodies in the UK: www2.bcu.ac.uk/docs/cuc/pubs/CUC-Guide-FINAL.pdf
- CUC (2004) CUC Governance Code of Practice and General Principles: www2.bcu.ac.uk/docs/cuc/pubs/CUC-Summary-Guide-HEFCEFinal.pdf

Consultation question 3:

Are there further categories of information about the higher education provider that it is sound practice to offer to the general public, and that should be mentioned specifically?

Information for prospective students

The term 'prospective student' covers anyone who is exploring the possibility of studying with a particular higher education provider from showing an initial interest, through the applications and admissions process, up to the point where they register/enrol and become a 'current student' of the provider. Information that is of use to a prospective student may also be relevant for the parents, advisers, sponsors or supporters of students and their application.

Some of the information that is relevant for the wider group of audiences is of interest to prospective students as well. More detailed information is necessary to enable prospective students to make informed decisions about the location of study; the programme of study and award; the mode of study; and the support that is made available to students. Some of this information is at institutional level and some at the level of the award.

Indicator 3

Higher education providers describe the process for application and admission to the programme of study.

Information about how to apply directs prospective students to the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) and/or other bodies as appropriate, but may also provide guidance on alternative forms of application. Entry requirements are specified along with details of other required prior experience where appropriate. The provider's processes for the recognition of prior learning or for other non-standard entry considerations are described together with information about how to use them. Information for international students, including any additional documentation or other requirements, where appropriate, is provided. Indications of the costs of study are provided including full details of fees payable for the programme of study, additional costs associated with the programme of study, general living expenses, and any bursaries or scholarships that may be available.

Indicator 4

Higher education providers make available to prospective students sufficient information to enable them to begin their programme with an understanding of the academic environment in which they will be studying and the support that will be made available to them.

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Prospective students need to be sure that the higher education provider they choose will give them the environment they need in which to learn effectively. Providers inform prospective students what would be expected of them if and when they enrol as students, and what they could then expect of the provider. Providers also give information about the roles, rights and responsibilities of prospective students, and what they can expect of the provider.

Providers therefore publicise to prospective students their overall strategies for teaching, learning and assessment. This is accompanied by information about the resources and facilities available to support and enhance students' learning, such as teaching staff; learning support staff; advisory services; classrooms; libraries; specialist learning environments such as laboratories and studios; and communication and information technologies, including virtual learning environments (see also *Chapter B4: Student support, learning resources and careers education, information and guidance*).

At the level of the award, higher education providers give prospective students indications of progression, retention, and award rates for the programme of study, as well as graduate destination information and employment opportunities. It is sound practice to provide details about curriculum design; teaching, learning and assessment strategies; learning outcomes; and employability. Providers include information about their connections with industry, business and the professions, including links with PSRBs and employers. Opportunities for work-based learning are described. This information may be published in a variety of formats, including but not limited to prospectuses, programme specifications, and careers opportunities and graduate destinations. This may be presented in a variety of styles and formats depending on the provider and its target audience. Opportunities for study abroad and other international opportunities are indicated.

Providers publicise to prospective students information about support services; student engagement with the students' union, association or guild, where appropriate (see *Chapter B5: Student engagement*); arrangements for pastoral care; living accommodation available to students; and social and leisure facilities. Where a higher education provider operates across several sites, works with collaborative partners, or operates through virtual learning environments, information about the various study modes and options is provided (see *Chapter B10: Management of collaborative arrangements*).

In order to help prospective students evaluate this information, higher education providers point them to summaries from both external and/or internal student surveys as appropriate.

Relevant references and guidelines concerning information higher education providers give to prospective students:

- Key Information Set (KIS), HEFCE: www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/infohe/kis.htm
Employability Statements, HEFCE: www.hefce.ac.uk/econsoc/employer/employstate/
- Key Information Set (KIS), HEFCW: www.hefcw.ac.uk/documents/publications/circulars/circulars_2011/W11%2027HE%20Key%20Information%20Sets%20Outcomes%20and%20next%20steps.pdf
Employability Statements, HEFCW: www.hefcw.ac.uk/documents/publications/circulars/circulars_2010/W10%2032HE%20employability%20statements.pdf.

Consultation question 4:

Are there further categories of information that it is sound practice to offer to prospective students, and that should be mentioned here specifically? Are there categories of information placed here that may be better situated elsewhere in Part C: Information about higher education provision?

Information for current students

Prospective students become current students at the point of registration/enrolment. Information that providers give to prospective students is in large part also relevant for current students. However, current students need information at a greater level of detail in order to make the most of their higher education experience. Providers therefore ensure that all such information is up to date and brought to the attention of current students at the appropriate time.

Indicator 5

Full and up to date information on the programme of study is provided to current students at the start of the programme and at appropriate intervals throughout their studies.

Normally, this information is provided through programme level and/or module level guides or handbooks. Typical information may include:

- curriculum details, including choices to be made during the programme of study, for example options for specialisation
- reading lists
- timetable of scheduled and unscheduled learning activities
- assessment details, including content, timing, deadlines for submission, the return of marked work, and arrangements for feedback (see *Chapter B6: Assessment of students and accreditation of prior learning*)
- tutorial support
- opportunities for international experience
- work-based learning
- relevant details about the administration of learning, teaching and assessment, for example arrangements for the submission of work, and the return of and feedback on marked work.

Current students are given access to the full set of regulations and policies that apply to their award. This information sets out, or refers to, details of academic and pastoral student support systems; support services; the facilities provided to support learning; work placement and work-based learning opportunities; and any opportunities for international experience. It is sound practice that a provider who operates on several campuses or collaborates with partners details how students' learning is supported on each site.

Indicator 6

Higher education providers describe the roles and responsibilities of students and of the higher education provider respectively.

Providers make current students aware that there are channels for feedback and for voicing particular concerns. The articulation of what students can expect of the institution and what the institution expects of its students often takes the form of a student charter. However, this need not be the case; it may be articulated in a registration document or agreement at award or individual module level. Whatever form it takes, this information includes details of how feedback is sought from students at various levels, how it is acted upon, and how those actions are communicated back to students.

Providers make sure students are aware of policies and procedures relevant to their studies such as those pertaining to good academic conduct; research ethics; extenuating circumstances; appeals and complaints; student conduct; and professional conduct and fitness to practice (see *Chapter B9: Complaints and appeals*). There may be other statements of the roles, rights and responsibilities of students, especially in the area of communications and information technology.

Providers set out how they engage with students, for example by describing mechanisms for electing/selecting student representatives, and for gathering and responding to student feedback. It is sound practice to make available documentation of committees or groups at organisation or award level that have student representation (see *Chapter B7: External examining*).

Indicator 7

Institutions provide students with information about careers advice, information and guidance, and about employability.

Higher education providers ensure that students are kept informed of opportunities available to them to learn about career paths, and make such information and guidance available to students throughout their programme of study.

Providers may make available opportunities for students to engage directly with employers through placements or internships, or through volunteering schemes; or providers may make available opportunities for work-based learning. These opportunities may be available as additions to the curriculum or they may be integrated within the curriculum.

Consultation question 5:

Are there further categories of information that it is sound practice to offer to current students, and that should be mentioned here specifically? Are there categories of information placed here that may be better situated elsewhere in Part C: Information about higher education provision?

Information for students on completion of their studies

Current students become alumni upon completion of their studies. The relationship between higher education providers and their students does not end there, but extends beyond the point where students complete their studies.

Indicator 8

On completion of their studies, higher education providers issue to students a comprehensive and detailed record of their studies, which gives evidence to others of the students' achievement and its value.

Higher education providers have rigorous mechanisms in place to safeguard the integrity of certificates and transcripts of students' achievements. In the case of collaborative provision, the provider includes information on the partner organisation where the study was completed.

Certificates and transcripts are produced within a reasonable period of time after the completion of the programme of study. Procedures for the issue of replacement certificates or transcripts are subject to appropriate checks on the validity of the request.

Higher education providers inform students who have completed their studies about the services which may be available to alumni.

Consultation question 6:

Are there further categories of information that it is sound practice to offer to students on completion of their studies, and that should be mentioned here specifically? Are there categories of information placed here that may be better situated elsewhere in Part C: Information about higher education provision?

Information for assuring quality and standards

Some information is used primarily by higher education providers themselves to maintain academic standards and assure the quality of student learning opportunities. In order to do this, providers make effective use of management information and other internal and external indicators to monitor standards and quality, including processes for programme approval, monitoring and review. This information is also used by QAA when it conducts periodic external reviews to assure the public that the provider's academic standards and quality are sound.

Indicator 9

Higher education providers set out in detail their arrangements for the maintenance of academic standards and for the assurance and enhancement of the quality of the student learning opportunities, including policies and procedures for the management of academic standards and quality.

Higher education providers ensure that information about their framework for the management of academic standards, quality assurance, and enhancement is clearly and consistently

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documented and that those with responsibility for academic standards and quality are fully informed about it.

This often takes the form of an institutional code of practice or quality handbook, although there are a variety of methods of publishing these procedures. These include policies and procedures for assessment, including the constitution, operation, and protocols of boards of examiners or equivalent (see *Chapter B6: Assessment of students and accreditation of prior learning*, and *Chapter B7: External examining*). Where appropriate, reference is made to external reference points, including the Quality Code.

In the case of collaborative partnerships, the responsibility for standards and quality rests with the awarding body. The awarding body will show how it assures itself that the delegation of aspects of the management of standards and quality to the partner is effective.

Indicator 10

An up to date and authoritative record of an awarding body's formal arrangements with its collaborative partners, and a listing of its collaborative programmes operated through those partnerships or agencies, is available.

This record takes the form of a register that lists details of all partnerships. It is supplemented by information that can take a variety of forms but which describes the respective roles and responsibilities of partners in relation to the management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. This may include promotion and publicity; recruitment, selection and admissions; learning, teaching and assessment; management of student records; and quality assurance (see *Chapter B10: Management of collaborative arrangements*).

Indicator 11

Higher education providers produce timely, relevant and robust internal management information that is appropriate to their mission and modus operandi, and that supports the provider's evidence-based monitoring of its academic standards and quality of provision.

Management information is necessary for the effective management of standards and quality, and will be produced for use within the provider. The precise nature of this information will vary by provider and relate to the management style and culture within that organisation. However, providers are likely to have management information systems that produce, for example, detailed information on student progression and achievement to enable the institution to assure itself of academic standards and quality.

Consultation question 7:

Are there further categories of information that it is sound practice to accumulate for the purposes of monitoring and managing academic standards and quality, and that should be mentioned here specifically? Are there categories of information placed here that may be better situated elsewhere in Part C: Information about higher education provision?

In addition to consultation questions 1-7 that relate to specific sections or Indicators, the following consultation questions are presented. These relate to the whole document.

Consultation question 8:

Part C: Information about higher education provision needs to be applicable in all four countries of the UK, as does the Quality Code overall. Is Part C worded in such a way as to accommodate different regulatory frameworks pertaining to information about higher education provision?

Consultation question 9:

Is Part C: Information about higher education provision sensitive to the diversity of higher education providers, of higher education students, and of others seeking information about higher education?

Appendix 1 - The Indicators

Expectation about providing information about higher education

The Quality Code sets out the following Expectation concerning information about higher education provision, which providers of higher education are required to meet.

UK higher education providers produce information about the higher education experience they offer that is valid, reliable, useful and accessible.

The Indicators

Indicator 1

Higher education providers publish information that describes their role within the UK higher education sector.

Indicator 2

Higher education providers publicise institutional policies and procedures that are relevant and of interest to all audiences.

Indicator 3

Higher education providers describe the process for application and admission to the programme of study.

Indicator 4

Higher education providers make available to prospective students sufficient information to enable them to begin their programme with an understanding of the academic environment in which they will be studying and the support that will be made available to them.

Indicator 5

Full and up to date information on the programme of study is provided to current students at the start of the programme and at appropriate intervals throughout their studies.

Indicator 6

Higher education providers describe the roles and responsibilities of students and of the higher education provider respectively.

Indicator 7

Institutions provide students with information about careers advice, information and guidance, and about employability.

Indicator 8

On completion of their studies, higher education providers issue to students a comprehensive and detailed record of their studies, which gives evidence to others of the students' achievement and its value.

Indicator 9

Higher education providers set out in detail their arrangements for the maintenance of academic standards and for the assurance and enhancement of the quality of the student learning

opportunities, including policies and procedures for the management of academic standards and quality.

Indicator 10

An up to date and authoritative record of an awarding body's formal arrangements with its collaborative partners, and a listing of its collaborative programmes operated through those partnerships or agencies, is available.

Indicator 11

Higher education providers produce timely, relevant and robust internal management information that is appropriate to their mission and modus operandi, and that supports the provider's evidence-based monitoring of its academic standards and quality of provision.

Appendix 2 - Members of the Advisory Group for Part C

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