QAA

UK Quality Code
for Higher Education

Part B: Assuring and enhancing
academic quality

Chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review

Contents

Introduction

The following supersedes parts of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review* (2006), published by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), and forms a Chapter of the new UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code).

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 QAA through an extensive process of consultation with higher education providers; their representative bodies; the National Union of Students; professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs); 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 its purpose and context.

Introduction to this Chapter

This Chapter of the Quality Code takes as its starting point the principle that formal and effective procedures should exist in all institutions for the monitoring and review of programmes of study, and for their withdrawal when necessary. It recognises institutions' own responsibilities to assure the standards of their awards and quality of the students' learning experiences, and to maintain the currency of their awards following initial approval.

For the purpose of this Chapter of the Quality Code a programme is defined as an approved curriculum followed by a registered student. This will normally be a named award route that leads to the intended learning outcomes set out in the relevant programme specification (see *Chapter A3: The programme level*). Programmes may be offered at different levels within a single subject. A programme may be multidisciplinary, for example, a joint honours degree or a combined honours degree. The term programme may also refer to the main pathways through a modular

scheme, which may itself include several subjects. In many institutions programmes are constructed from individual units or modules which have their own outcomes. The principles of monitoring and review that are set out in this Chapter of the Quality Code may, where appropriate, be equally applied to such units.

Users of this Chapter of the Quality Code are also recommended to refer to other Chapters, in particular:

- *Chapter A1: The national level*
- *Chapter A2: The subject and qualification level*
- *Chapter A3: The programme level*
- *Chapter A4: Approval and review*
- *Chapter A5: Externality*
- *Chapter B1: Programme design and approval*
- *Chapter B10: Management of collaborative arrangements*

Expectations about programme monitoring and review

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

> **Higher education providers have effective procedures in place to routinely monitor and periodically review programmes.**

The following Expectation is also relevant to this topic:

> **Higher education providers have in place effective processes to approve and periodically review the validity and relevance of programmes (***Chapter A4: Approval and review***).**

Indicators of sound practice

General principles

> **Indicator 1**
>
> **Institutions ensure that their responsibilities for standards and quality are discharged effectively through their procedures for the monitoring and review of programmes.**

The monitoring and review of programmes are central to an institution's assurance of the quality and standards of its provision. When evaluating policies and practices for programme monitoring and review against this Indicator, it is important to consider whether due account is taken of:

- external reference points, including any relevant subject benchmark statements, national frameworks for higher education qualifications and, where appropriate, the requirements of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies, employers

and any relevant national legislation/national commitments to European and international processes

- the compatibility of programme proposals and developments with institutional goals and mission

- strategic academic and resource planning

- existing provision within the institution, including any awards that may be offered jointly with other UK or overseas institutions

- the level of risk involved in each review process and the optimal level of resource necessary to ensure that the required outcomes of the process are achieved.

> **Indicator 2**
>
> **Institutions ensure that the overriding responsibility of the academic authority (for example senate or academic board) to set, maintain and assure standards is respected and that any delegation of power by the academic authority to review programmes is properly defined and exercised.**

It is important that the respective roles, responsibilities and authority of different bodies involved in programme monitoring and review are clearly defined in order that staff and students involved in such processes are clear about the hierarchy of procedures and about which body will take final responsibility. The evaluation of any delegated power is important in allowing the institution to ensure that it is continuing to operate its processes in an effective manner.

> **Indicator 3**
>
> **Institutions make use of external participation at key stages for the review of programmes, as independence and objectivity are essential to provide confidence that the standards and quality of the programmes are appropriate.**

External participation is important for ensuring that programmes are reviewed in the light of independent advice and for ensuring both transparency of process and confirmation of standards. Such external participation provides assurance at various levels: to the team delivering the programme and to the institution itself in monitoring the independence and objectivity of decisions taken under its procedures; to its students; and to any reviewers who may carry out reviews/audits that are external to the institution's own processes.

It is important that institutions ensure they make use of external contributions of an appropriate kind when reviewing programmes. External examiners may provide useful contributions at various stages of review processes but, for the purpose of demonstrating impartiality, they are unlikely to be appropriate members of formal review panels. It is also important that this external participation is proportionate to the level, importance and complexity of the process being followed. Useful contributions could be made in different ways by, for example:

- external advisers who provide relevant information and guidance on current developments in the discipline(s). In considering the guidance provided by academic peers from other institutions, the Higher Education Academy may be a useful resource in providing access to staff working in specific subject areas

- academic peers from other disciplines within the institution

- any programme partners, for example, institutions with which there are collaborative arrangements

- students, either studying on the programme or with an appropriate representative role

- graduates from the programme

- appropriate PSRBs

- external sources and advisers who provide relevant information and guidance on current developments including, for example, in the workplace (see Appendix 4 for illustrative examples of such sources).

The use of appropriate externality in processes for programme review may also allow an institution to avail itself of opportunities for enhancement, as well as for assurance.

Indicator 4

Monitoring and review processes are clearly described and communicated to those who are involved in them.

It is important that processes for monitoring and review of programmes are understood by all those who are involved or who are have an interest in them. The following may help institutions as they consider the clarity and accessibility of their processes.

- The publication of clear principles and procedures for the monitoring and review of programmes, that are available to all staff and students in the institution and to external participants in the processes, including the institution's own processes for deciding whether to group programmes together for review purposes or to scrutinise them in a more detailed, individual way.

- The clear statement of the different stages of review and the clear definition of the roles and responsibilities of participants (see Indicator 2).

- The clear definition of the responsibility for initiating the process of monitoring and review of programmes.

- How staff development strategies and activities may include the dissemination of good practice in relation to programme design, approval, monitoring and review.

Monitoring and review processes

Institutions should consider the appropriate balance between routine monitoring and periodic review of programmes so that there is a continuous cycle. Routine monitoring is an activity likely to be undertaken within the providing unit. Periodic review is normally an institutional process, involving external participants of high calibre and with academic/professional credibility. In developing and evaluating such processes, institutions will want to be assured that they are monitoring the cumulative impact of small/incremental changes.

Indicator 5

Institutions routinely monitor (in an agreed cycle) the effectiveness of their programmes:

- **to ensure that programmes remain current and valid in light of developing knowledge in the discipline, and practice in its application**

- **to evaluate the extent to which the intended learning outcomes are being attained by students**

- **to evaluate the continuing effectiveness of the curriculum and of assessment in relation to the intended learning outcomes**

- **to ensure that recommendations for appropriate actions are followed up to remedy any identified shortcomings.**

Routine monitoring of programmes is important; it allows providers to consider the effectiveness of the programme in achieving its stated aims, and the success of students in attaining the intended learning outcomes. It is a process to which an element of proportionality and risk analysis may be applied, with institutions making informed decisions about the kind of process that will be appropriate. Routine monitoring activity, which will often be the responsibility of people who appraise their own performance at the end of each academic year, may consider, for example:

- external examiners' reports

- any reports from accrediting or other external bodies

- staff and student feedback

- feedback from former students and their employers

- student progress and other relevant data

- material available to students such as programme specifications, student handbooks and websites.

Effective and prompt follow-up of any recommendations made will protect the interests of current students and should also allow any staff and resource development needs to be addressed.

Indicator 6

Institutions periodically undertake a broader review of the continuing validity and relevance of programmes offered.

The timing and nature of reviews will depend on a number of factors, including the rate of development of knowledge and practice in the discipline, the extent to which wider questions of overall aims are dealt with in routine monitoring, and overall institutional policy on such reviews. It is important to remember the concept of continuous evaluation; evaluation processes are not carried out in isolation from one another or from other institutional priorities.

Periodic review assesses the continuing validity and relevance of the programme in the light of, for example, the following:

- the effect of changes, including those which are cumulative and those made over time, to the design and operation of the programme

- the continuing availability of staff and physical resources

- current research and practice in the application of knowledge in the relevant discipline(s), technological advances, and developments in teaching and learning

- changes to external points of reference, such as subject benchmark statements, relevant PSRB requirements

- changes in student demand, employer expectations and employment opportunities

- data relating to student progression and achievement, including that available on the Teaching Quality Information website

- student feedback, including the National Student Survey.

Programme withdrawal

Indicator 7

In the event of a decision to discontinue a programme, measures are taken to notify and protect the interests of students registered for, or accepted for admission to, the programme.

Institutions are responsible for managing their portfolio of provision, including any awards that are offered jointly with another UK or overseas institution, and other collaborative partners. This may involve the withdrawal of existing programmes as well as the design and development of new ones.

It is important that the process for the orderly withdrawal of programmes is as well embedded, articulated and understood as those for design, approval and review.

In the event of significant changes to the character of the programme, an institution needs to have a process in place to manage this change effectively. It also needs to be clear about what, in its own institutional context, constitutes a significant alteration to the character of the programme, and how any collaborating partners are kept informed.

Evaluation of processes

Indicator 8

Institutions have a means of assessing the effectiveness of their programme monitoring and review practices.

Evaluation of processes can provide a focus for enhancement and will allow institutions to consider:

- the benefits gained by the institution, staff, students and other stakeholders from the monitoring and review activities undertaken

- how the outcomes of processes promote enhancement of students' learning experiences

- the identification and dissemination of effective practice, both internally and externally

- opportunities to make monitoring and review practices more effective and efficient

- whether the institution, through its processes, is managing risk appropriately and proportionately for its portfolio of programmes.

Appendix 1: The indicators

Expectations about programme monitoring and review

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

Higher education providers have effective procedures in place to routinely monitor and periodically review programmes.

The Indicators

Indicator 1

Institutions ensure that their responsibilities for standards and quality are discharged effectively through their procedures for the monitoring and review of programmes.

Indicator 2

Institutions ensure that the overriding responsibility of the academic authority (for example senate or academic board) to set, maintain and assure standards is respected and that any delegation of power by the academic authority to review programmes is properly defined and exercised.

Indicator 3

Institutions make use of external participation at key stages for the review of programmes, as independence and objectivity are essential to provide confidence that the standards and quality of the programmes are appropriate.

Indicator 4

Monitoring and review processes are clearly described and communicated to those who are involved in them.

Indicator 5

Institutions routinely monitor (in an agreed cycle) the effectiveness of their programmes:

- to ensure that programmes remain current and valid in light of developing knowledge in the discipline, and practice in its application

- to evaluate the extent to which the intended learning outcomes are being attained by students

- to evaluate the continuing effectiveness of the curriculum and of assessment in relation to the intended learning outcomes

- to ensure that recommendations for appropriate actions are followed up to remedy any identified shortcomings.

Indicator 6

Institutions periodically undertake a broader review of the continuing validity and relevance of programmes offered.

Indicator 7

In the event of a decision to discontinue a programme, measures are taken to notify and protect the interests of students registered for, or accepted for admission to, the programme.

Indicator 8

Institutions have a means of assessing the effectiveness of their programme monitoring and review practices.

Appendix 2

This Appendix does not form part of the Quality Code. It is included to provide a series of prompts for institutions to consider when determining their own guidance on programme design and for providers to use when working with institutional processes in this area. It may prove useful for staff development purposes and as guidance for any participants in the design and approval process(es) who are external to the institution.

In many institutions programmes are constructed from individual units, or modules, which have their own outcomes. The principles of design, approval, monitoring and review that are set out in this Chapter of the Quality Code may, where appropriate, be applied equally to such units or modules. In those cases where a modular programme may be negotiated by an individual student, with guidance and agreement from the institution, the design principles in particular should inform the policies and procedures within which such negotiation takes place.

Academic programmes fulfil a range of purposes including the provision of personal academic development, preparation for knowledge creation and research, preparation for specific (often professional) employment or for general employment, or as preparation for lifelong learning. Understanding and defining the balance of purposes is important in order to design a curriculum and to provide the related learning opportunities that will enable the stated intended learning outcomes to be achieved. Institutions should aim to design and deliver programmes that reflect current knowledge and best practice and meet the requirements of the student target group and the goals and strategic plans of the institution.

Design criteria

- Do the institutional guidelines for the design of programmes allow for the promotion of good practice in programme design?

- Do they provide the assurance that standards are set appropriately and intended learning outcomes specified accordingly?

Level

At what level is the programme being designed/evaluated?

- What is the level of the intended learning outcomes for the programme for any named stages in the programme? (A level is an indicator of the relative demand, complexity, depth of study and learner autonomy involved in a programme. Various systems are currently in use to identify levels, including descriptors indicating the intellectual and skill attainment expected of students.)

- What is the location of the programme on *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*? Are there any European or other reference points that should be considered with regard to level?

Progression

- Does the curriculum promote progression so that the demands on the learner in intellectual challenge, skills, knowledge, conceptualisation and learning autonomy increase?

10

Flexibility

- Has the range of requirements of learners likely to enter the programme been considered?

Coherence

- Has the overall coherence and intellectual integrity of the programme been considered?

- Has the programme been designed in a way that will ensure the student's experiences have a logic and integrity that are clearly linked to the purpose of the programme?

- Have the academic and practical elements and opportunities for personal development and the academic outcomes been considered?

- Has the breadth and depth of the subject material to be included in the programme been determined?

Integrity

- Are the expectations given to students and others about the intended learning outcomes of the programme realistic and deliverable?

- Has the feasibility of attainment of the outcomes been considered?

Reference points

Have internal and external points of reference been used to inform the design of the programme? (External reference points might be provided by a subject benchmark statement, information about similar or parallel programmes elsewhere or expectations of PSRBs, or employer expectations (for example, as set out in occupational standards). In a student negotiated programme, an inherent part of the negotiation process will involve the student and tutor, in designing the programme, taking into consideration the intended level of the award and jointly agreeing the relevant sources of reference.)

Appendix 3

This Appendix is not part of the Quality Code. It is included to assist institutional review panels. While the Quality Code does not require that institutions use these questions, they may be useful as a framework for routine monitoring and periodic review panels. Institutions will wish to determine their own approaches but might find it helpful to consider the questions as they reflect on their practices. They may prove useful for staff development purposes and as guidelines for any participants in the routine monitoring and periodic review process(es).

How do the intended learning outcomes relate to external reference points and to the broad aims of the provision?

1   What are the intended learning outcomes for a programme?

2   How do they relate to external reference points including relevant subject benchmark statements, the qualifications framework, the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area and any professional body requirements?

3   How do they relate to the overall aims of the provision as stated by the subject provider?

4   Are they appropriate to the aims?

How are the curricula design principles used to permit achievement of the intended learning outcomes?

5   How does the provider ensure that curriculum content enables students to achieve the intended learning outcomes?

6   How does the provider ensure that the design and organisation of the curriculum is effective in promoting student learning and achievement of the intended learning outcomes?

How are the intended learning outcomes communicated to students, staff and external examiners?

7   How are the intended outcomes of a programme and its constituent parts communicated to staff, students and external examiners?

8   Do the students know what is expected of them?

How does the subject provider create the conditions for achievement of the intended learning outcomes?

9   Do the design and content of the curricula encourage achievement of the intended learning outcomes in terms of knowledge and understanding, cognitive skills, subject-specific skills (including practical/professional skills), transferable skills, progression to employment and/or further study, and personal development?

10   Is there evidence that curricular content and design is informed by recent developments in techniques of teaching and learning, by current research and scholarship, and by any changes in relevant occupational or professional requirements?

How does the assessment process work?

11   Does the assessment process enable learners to demonstrate achievement of all the intended learning outcomes?

12   Are there criteria that enable internal and external examiners to distinguish between different categories of achievement?

13   Can there be full confidence in the security and integrity of assessment procedures?

14   Does the assessment strategy have an adequate formative function in developing student abilities?

15   What evidence is there that the standards achieved by learners meet the minimum expectations for the award, as measured against relevant subject benchmark statements and the qualifications framework?

How does the institution review and improve the quality of the student learning experience?

16   How does the institution review and seek to enhance the quality of the student learning experience? Does it have strategies for building upon its quality assurance processes to enhance the quality of its provision?

17   How effective is teaching in relation to curriculum content and programme aims?

18   How effectively do staff draw upon their research, scholarship or professional activity to inform their teaching?

19   How good are the materials provided to support learning?

20   Is there effective engagement with and participation by students?

21   Is the quality of teaching maintained and enhanced through effective staff development, peer review of teaching, integration of part-time and visiting staff, effective team teaching and induction and mentoring of new staff?

22   How effectively is learning facilitated in terms of student workloads?

How is students' learning supported?

23   Is there an appropriate overall strategy for academic support, including written guidance, which is consistent with the student profile and the overall aims of the provision?

24   Are there effective arrangements for admission and induction which are generally understood by staff and applicants?

25   How effectively is learning facilitated by academic guidance, feedback and supervisory arrangements?

26   Are the arrangements for support clear and generally understood by staff and students?

27   Are students offered careers guidance?

How satisfactory are learning resources and how are they deployed?

28   Is the collective expertise of the staff suitable and available for effective delivery of the curricula, for the overall teaching, learning and assessment strategy and for the achievement of the intended learning outcomes?

29   Are appropriate staff development opportunities available?

30   Is appropriate technical and administrative support available?

31   Is there an overall strategy for the deployment of learning resources?

32   How effectively is learning facilitated in terms of the provision of resources?

33   Is suitable teaching and learning accommodation available?

34   Are the subject book and periodical stocks appropriate and accessible?

35   Are suitable equipment and appropriate information technology facilities available to learners?

Appendix 4

The following websites may provide further sources of information.

- The Higher Education Academy (www.heacademy.ac.uk)

- Information on external review processes operated by QAA (www.qaa.ac.uk)

- The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (www.enqa.eu)

- Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area. March 2005 (www.enqa.eu/pubs.lasso)

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