



# **UK Quality Code for Higher Education**

## **Part B: Assuring and enhancing academic quality**

### **Chapter B6: Assessment of students and the recognition of prior learning**

**Draft for consultation**

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## About the Quality Code

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

Each Chapter contains a single Expectation, which expresses the key principle that the higher education community has identified as essential for the assurance of academic standards and quality within the area covered by the Chapter. Higher education providers reviewed by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) are required to meet all the Expectations. The manner in which they do so is their own responsibility. QAA carries out reviews to check whether higher education providers are meeting the Expectations.<sup>2</sup>

Each Chapter has been developed by QAA through an extensive process of consultation with higher education providers; their representative bodies; the National Union of Students; professional, statutory and regulatory bodies; and other interested parties.

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

The Expectation in each Chapter is accompanied by a series of Indicators that reflect sound practice, and through which providers can demonstrate they are meeting the relevant Expectation. Indicators are not designed to be used as a checklist; they are intended to help providers reflect on and develop their regulations, procedures and practices to demonstrate that the Expectations in the Quality Code are being met. Each Indicator is numbered and printed in bold and is supported by an explanatory note that gives more information about it, together with examples of how the Indicator may be interpreted in practice.

The *UK Quality Code for Higher Education: General introduction*<sup>3</sup> should be considered in conjunction with this document. It provides a technical introduction for users, including guidance concerning the terminology used and a quick-reference glossary.

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

<sup>2</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review)

<sup>3</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Quality-Code-introduction.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Quality-Code-introduction.aspx)

## About this Chapter

This publication supersedes the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (the *Code of practice*), *Section 6: Assessment of students* and the *Guidelines on the accreditation of prior learning* published by QAA, and forms a Chapter of the Quality Code.

## Assessment of students and the recognition of prior learning

This Chapter of the Quality Code deals with the assessment and grading of student learning, both learning which is achieved as part of a formal programme offered by a higher education provider, and learning at the equivalent level achieved outside of the formal programme of study. The Chapter covers all forms of assessment used in the context of taught provision, and for the recognition of prior learning. The extent to which processes for assessment of taught provision are applicable to research degrees is determined by individual degree-awarding bodies. These are addressed in *Chapter B11: Research degrees*. All aspects of the role of external examiners in assessment are addressed in *Chapter B7: External examining*.

### The purpose of assessment

Assessment is a complex topic, since it involves two distinct aspects. First, it forms an essential element of the learning process. Students learn both from assessment activities and from the guidance they receive about those activities from staff; guidance which is focused on how they have performed (feedback) and guidance which is intended to help them in further assessment activities (increasingly referred to as feedforward). Second, it is the means by which academic staff form judgments as to what extent students have achieved the intended learning outcomes of a programme, or of an element of a programme. These judgments form the basis for the grading of student performance through the allocation of marks, grades and (where applicable) classification, and for the award of the qualification to which the programme leads.

While these two aspects are closely interrelated, matters related primarily to the first are dealt with in *Chapter B3: Learning and teaching*; the present Chapter focuses on those matters related to the processes of assessment and to the regulatory frameworks within which those processes take place. It is through the assessment process that higher education providers ensure that academic standards are maintained at the appropriate level and that student performance is rigorously judged against them. The interrelationship between assessment and other aspects of setting and maintaining academic standards is addressed in Part A: Setting and maintaining academic standards of the Quality Code.

Throughout the UK higher education system, assessment processes are based on explicit intended learning outcomes, both for programmes and for the elements which make up those programmes (such as modules or similar units). Judgements of student performance are based on the extent to which the student is able to demonstrate achievement of the corresponding intended learning outcomes.

### The recognition of prior learning

The recognition of prior learning (RPL) is included within this Chapter to make explicit the link between assessment used as the basis for recognising learning gained outside of a formal programme and that used for learning within a programme; the key features of sound practice are common to both forms.

The term 'recognition' is used to describe accurately the process in relation to two widely recognised forms of prior learning: prior certificated learning and prior informal (or experiential) learning. It also reflects terminology used in many European countries.

The recognition of prior certificated learning involves the transfer of credit, or exemption from part of a programme, for learning that has previously been assessed (for example professional awards, Higher National Diplomas, and Foundation Degrees). The essential characteristic of such learning is that the student has a certificate to evidence that the learning has been assessed. The higher education provider to which the student is applying determines the status of that certification (including consideration of its volume and level) as it relates to the higher education programme now being undertaken.

The recognition of prior informal learning involves an assessment process on the part of academic staff within the higher education provider that leads to recognition, normally through the award of credit. The essential feature of this process is that it is the learning (gained through experience) which is being assessed not the experience itself.

In both cases recognition takes place within the degree-awarding body's regulatory framework, which is designed to ensure that assessment decisions are conducted transparently, fairly and consistently for all programmes or subjects.

Prior learning relevant to this Chapter of the Quality Code is learning which is at the same level as the programme being undertaken, as defined within the applicable higher education qualifications framework. Where a student has relevant prior learning which is at a level lower than the programme, that learning will be relevant in terms of whether it meets, or contributes to meeting, the entry requirements for the programme. Recognition in this case is part of the admissions process and is addressed in *Chapter B2: Admissions* of the Quality Code.

## External links

Higher education providers are responsible for ascertaining which laws and regulations apply to them. To meet the Expectation of this Chapter of the Quality Code, higher education providers may wish to consider the indicative lists of reference points, guidance and examples of good practice given within the Chapter. QAA takes no responsibility for the content of external websites.

### Further guidelines, references and resources

The Council of the European Union (2012) *Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (2012/C 398/01)*

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2012:398:0001:0005:EN:PDF>

European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (2009) *European Guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning*

[www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/publications/5059.aspx](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/publications/5059.aspx)

European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (2008) *Assessment matters - The quality assurance of student assessment in higher education, Report of an international working group*

[www.enqa.eu/files/QA%20of%20Student%20Assessment%20Report.pdf](http://www.enqa.eu/files/QA%20of%20Student%20Assessment%20Report.pdf)

QAA (2012) *Understanding assessment: its role in safeguarding academic standards and quality in higher education, Second edition*

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

The Higher Education Academy (2012) *A Marked Improvement, Transforming assessment in higher education*

[www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/assessment/a-marked-improvement](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/assessment/a-marked-improvement)

The Higher Education Academy

[www.heacademy.ac.uk/assessment](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assessment)

QAA Scotland

[www.qaa.ac.uk/Scotland/DevelopmentAndEnhancement/Pages/Recognition-of-prior-learning.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Scotland/DevelopmentAndEnhancement/Pages/Recognition-of-prior-learning.aspx)

QAA (2011) *Outcomes from Institutional Audit: 2007-09, Assessment and feedback*

[www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/outcomes-assessment-and-feedback.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/outcomes-assessment-and-feedback.aspx)

QAA (2012) *Outcomes from Institutional Audit: 2009-11, Assessment and feedback*

[www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Outcomes-audit-assessment.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Outcomes-audit-assessment.aspx)

QAA Scotland Enhancement Themes: Integrative Assessment

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

QAA Scotland Enhancement Themes: Assessment

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



## Expectation

The Quality Code sets out the following Expectation about the assessment of students and the recognition of prior learning, which higher education providers are required to meet.

**Higher education providers have in place equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment, including for the recognition of prior learning, which enable every student to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the award.**

# Indicators of sound practice

## The basis for effective assessment

### Indicator 1

To secure the academic standards of awards, higher education providers have effective procedures for:

- **implementing rigorous assessment policies and practices that ensure the standard for each award is set and maintained at the appropriate level, and that ensure student performance is equitably judged against this standard**
- **designing, approving, monitoring and reviewing all forms of assessment, including those for the assessment of prior learning**
- **evaluating how effectively their assessment practice maintains academic standards and promotes effective learning.**

The process of assessment is a key element in the setting and maintenance of academic standards. For providers which are not degree-awarding bodies assessment is carried out within the parameters of the authority delegated by the degree-awarding body, recognising that the ultimate responsibility for academic standards rests with the degree-awarding body.

Assessment policies and practices and the approving, monitoring and reviewing of assessment for individual programmes are aligned with relevant national and international frameworks and guidance as defined in Part A of the Quality Code, and where applicable with the guidelines or requirements of Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs). Higher education providers are clear about where responsibilities lie for assuring the effectiveness of their practices.

In evaluating their assessment practices, whether through monitoring or review, higher education providers:

- consider the extent to which assessment tasks and associated criteria enable judgments to be made about student achievement of the intended learning outcomes of modules and programmes at subject level
- evaluate the impact of reassessment policies, to ensure that these are equally as rigorous and equitable as those for initial assessment
- verify at subject and institutional levels that assessment policies and practices remain responsive to external developments in assessment, including PSRB requirements, where appropriate
- have in place mechanisms to monitor and compare student achievement and academic standards over time
- consider management information concerning assessment, for example: noting key features of mark, grade or honours distributions; identifying any relationship between student entry qualifications and assessment outcomes; comparing the performance of students studying for the same qualification with other providers with whom they offer learning opportunities; tracking the progress and performance of students who have made successful claims for RPL
- consider feedback from applicants for RPL - successful or unsuccessful - about the RPL process

- consider feedback from sources such as external surveys on student perceptions and understanding of assessment and feedback.

Programme design, approval, monitoring and review are addressed in *Chapter B1: Programme design and approval* and *Chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review* of the Quality Code.

The delivery of provision involving more than one provider or other organisation, including the responsibility of degree-awarding bodies, is addressed in *Chapter B10: Managing higher education provision with others* of the Quality Code.

## **Indicator 2**

**Assessment principles, regulations and processes, including those for the recognition of prior learning, are explicit, transparent and accessible to all intended audiences.**

A number of distinct audiences have an interest in assessment processes. These include students, academic and administrative staff, external examiners, representatives of PSRBs, and others outside the higher education provider who wish to be assured that assessment is being carried out equitably and securely. It is also in the interests of providers themselves to ensure that principles, regulations and processes are clear and accessible to all those who need to make use of them. Public confidence in the value, standards and quality of higher education depends on the evident integrity of the assessment process.

Higher education providers have a transparent approach to the way in which student achievement is reported at the level of the individual assessment task, and the way in which this is combined at module and programme levels, including for RPL claims and where achievement across different subjects or academic departments is being combined, as in joint degrees or modular programmes. This includes being clear about whether numerical marks, grading bands or pass/fail are used, and takes account of the recognised benefits and limitations of each approach. It also addresses the combining of achievement at award level, for example the use of classifications (such as First, Upper Second, Merit, Distinction). The approach used takes into account established practice within different subjects, but ensures that results achieved are capable of being combined in a clear way and in a way that enables comparable levels of student achievement to be recognised.

Any limit on the award of credit (where used) through the recognition of prior learning is clearly stated in the regulations, as is the way in which such credit will be used for the purposes of progression, the making of the final award, and any grading or classification of that award. Limits are defined both in terms of the smallest amount of learning that can be recognised - for example a module or cluster of learning outcomes - and the maximum. Regulations reflect a considered approach to the use/reuse of credit and double counting of learning, for example where the learning has already contributed to a qualification at the same level as the current qualification.

Regulations make explicit whether informal learning will be graded, and what approach the degree-awarding body will take to grades or marks attached to certificated learning awarded by another degree-awarding body or other awarding organisation.

Regulations and processes are made available in a way which makes them easy to find. They are written in a way that is clear to students, and take into account equality and diversity issues and barriers to access. Providers enable students to find out how to obtain the regulations and processes easily, for example by signposting them from student handbooks.

The provision of information about assessment forms part of the wider responsibility of higher education providers to produce information for the public, for prospective, current and past students, and for those responsible for academic standards and quality. More detailed guidance on this topic is to be found in Part C: Information about higher education provision of the Quality Code.

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

QAA (2007) *Quality matters: The classification of degree awards*  
[www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Quality-matters-The-classification-of-degree-awards.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Quality-matters-The-classification-of-degree-awards.aspx)

#### **Indicator 3**

**Higher education providers assure themselves that everyone involved in assessment processes, including the recognition of prior learning, is suitably qualified, supported and developed.**

Degree-awarding bodies determine what is necessary to demonstrate in order to show that those involved in assessment are qualified for the role, whether through holding a formal qualification or through experience. Consideration is given to the range of roles involved in assessment. In addition to academic staff who are responsible for making judgements on individual assessments, these can include:

- chairs and other academic members of examination boards/assessment panels
- employer/placement provider staff involved in the assessment of work-based learning
- postgraduate students
- administrative staff who support the assessment process.

Members of staff new to a role relating to assessment are encouraged to engage in appropriate induction and mentoring opportunities made available by the higher education provider.

Once appointed, and throughout their career, staff engage with opportunities to develop and extend their capabilities and reflect upon their practice. These may be opportunities provided by the higher education provider, or supported by the provider but offered by other bodies, such as those that promote professional standards, cross-sector membership organisations, or subject-based bodies. Examples of the areas in which higher education providers consider offering support and development include:

- promoting understanding of the theory and practice of assessment and its implementation, including the different purposes of formative and summative assessment, the importance of testing intended learning outcomes and of engaging with students to enable and promote dialogic and reflective use of feedback

- providing staff development for all involved in the RPL process to facilitate effective signposting of support from enquiry to assessment outcomes
- promoting an understanding of the theory and practice of prior learning assessment, including the nature of guidance and support required of assessors to facilitate such assessment
- raising awareness of staff about the importance of designing assessments that minimise opportunities for plagiarism and other forms of unfair practice
- enabling staff to learn about new approaches to assessment as well as the best ways to operate existing methods
- encouraging staff to recognise that cultural differences and differences in learning styles may affect student perceptions of assessment and their ability to perform assessment tasks successfully
- raising staff awareness of the need for, and practical implications of, inclusive practice (see also Indicator 13)
- introducing forms of moderation of feedback (through sampling) as part of peer-to-peer review
- meeting the development needs of all those involved in assessment procedures and processes, including interpretation of regulations, chairing of assessment meetings, and record-keeping at examination boards/assessment panels.

The appointment, support and continuing development of staff who teach or support learning is addressed in *Chapter B3: Learning and teaching* of the Quality Code. The induction of, and support for, external examiners is addressed in *Chapter B7: External examining* of the Quality Code.

#### **Indicator 4**

**Assessment and feedback practices are informed by reflection, evaluation of professional practice, and subject-specific and educational scholarship.**

Effective assessment practice occurs when staff have a sound understanding and up to date knowledge of the range of assessment methods and mechanisms for promoting feedback (and feedforward) relevant to their subject. They draw on scholarship, research and professional activity to evaluate and further develop their practice. Higher education providers support and provide structured opportunities for reflection to take place and for sound practice to be recognised and disseminated. Key areas that are covered may include:

- the role of assessment as a learning process - assessment as and for learning as well as assessment of learning
- the variety of modes of assessment, including the role of examinations, essays, multiple-choice testing, reflective journals, logs, peer assessment, portfolios, and assessment of performance and creative work
- the application of technology in assessment, including the use of tools such as wikis, blogs and podcasts, both for supporting assessment and for enabling feedback to students
- the assessment of work-based learning, including the involvement of employers and practitioners in the assessment process
- the assessment of prior learning, including guidance, support and assessment models that can enable more streamlined, enhanced approaches to RPL in support of flexible, efficient learning pathways within higher education

- the engagement of students in assessment, such as negotiating the form of assessment to be used; this is of particular relevance to the recognition of prior learning
- assessment setting to minimise the risk of unfair academic practice (see also Indicator 10)
- the use of different ways of reporting judgments on assessment, such as numerical marks, grades, or pass/fail (see also Indicator 2).

## Designing assessment

### Indicator 5

**The volume, timing and nature of assessment enables students to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes.**

Effective assessment design, including for RPL, involves consideration of the appropriate number of assessment tasks, their timing (relative to each other within and across modules) and the type of task to be used. It focuses on ensuring that programme level learning outcomes are addressed through the programme's constituent modules (or equivalent units). Particular attention is paid to programmes involving more than one subject or a range of modules from different subjects.

Students are provided with a balanced range of assessment which collectively takes account of having the opportunity to: reflect on and embed their learning; engage with and act upon feedback and feedforward before the next assessment, where appropriate; practice vocational skills or those involved in undertaking a particular method of assessment; experience different methods of assessment.

The timing of reassessment opportunities, where these are permitted, takes into account allowing sufficient time for students to engage in further learning following the initial (failed) assessment, while not delaying unduly students' opportunities to progress within, or complete, their programme.

Assessment (and reassessment) tasks are designed to minimise the likelihood of misconduct, for example through using a variety of assessment tasks to limit the possibility of plagiarism and through ensuring that examination questions are not reused from year to year.

Consideration is given to the appropriateness of assessment tools for the nature of the prior learning to be assessed. These tools might include a portfolio of evidence, a structured interview, completion of a piece of work accompanied by a reflective account of the learning achieved, artefacts or similar pieces of work, or completion of the usual assessment used to demonstrate learning in the module/programme for which comparability is being claimed.

The design of assessment also includes considering how programme level outcomes and level descriptors can be used to facilitate RPL.

Higher education providers address the amount of time available between completion of an assessment task by students and the date at which the results are required either by the student or the provider to ensure that those involved in marking and/or moderating the work have enough time to complete each stage. Particular attention is given to the timing of assessment for RPL, taking into account when the outcome of the recognition process needs to be known by the provider and the student.

The design of programmes is addressed in *Chapter B1: Programme design and approval* of the Quality Code.

#### **Indicator 6**

**The standards and criteria against which judgments on assessment and the recognition of prior learning will be made are provided to students and to staff involved in the assessment process.**

Developing, making readily available and using assessment standards and criteria and, where appropriate, marking schemes, provides a basis for improving fair and consistent marking across all subjects. Criteria are subject to different interpretation and cannot always capture all the nuance of academic judgement. Therefore discussion between staff and the use of exemplar assignments are important to build shared understanding.

From a student perspective, the discussion of criteria, use of exemplars and self and peer assessment activities helps students to develop an understanding of criteria similar to that of their teachers. This is reinforced where students are encouraged to recognise assessment criteria as a guide rather than a specification, given the complex nature of professional judgement.

Grading (or performance) criteria, for example grade descriptors or rubrics, are used to recognise differential student achievement against the assessment criteria, including exceptional performance. Where an assessment criterion specifies the importance of, for example, the use of evidence, grading criteria describe different levels of performance for that criterion. This enables different grades to be fairly awarded, although the limitations of interpreting assessment criteria apply.

Clear guidance to students about the criteria which will be used in coming to a judgment about the recognition of prior learning is important. This is provided before the student provides the evidence to support the claim or the assessment task is undertaken. The following criteria help to inform the development of such guidance.

- Acceptability - is there an appropriate match between the evidence presented and the learning claimed?
- Sufficiency - is there sufficient evidence to demonstrate the achievement of the learning claimed?
- Authenticity - is the evidence clearly related to the applicants' own efforts and achievements?
- Currency - does evidence relate to current learning? Where higher education providers have specific requirements or time limits for demonstration of currency these should be made clear.

#### **Indicator 7**

**The language in which assessment is conducted is normally that used in the associated teaching. Where this is not the case, higher education providers assure themselves that academic standards are not compromised.**

Degree-awarding bodies assure themselves that the academic standards of their awards remain secure where the language used for teaching the programme is

different from that for the assessment. Such arrangements may be in place in some overseas provision and also in the case of the use of British Sign Language.

Priority is given to ensuring that students are not disadvantaged or advantaged by the potential need to translate assessed work. For this reason, translation is avoided wherever possible. Where translation is necessary, degree-awarding bodies ensure that effective mechanisms are in place to assure the reliability and validity of the assessment outcomes.

Where higher education providers anticipate receiving requests from students for assessment to be undertaken in a language not used for teaching, they design and make available clear criteria for evaluating such cases. These criteria include guidance about the time at which requests can be made. Where requests are granted, this is made clear on the student's transcript.

Staff involved in teaching and assessing students have the necessary subject knowledge and expertise in the relevant language(s), and suitably qualified external examiners are appointed. The degree-awarding body's policy covers whether reference tools such as dictionaries are permitted in examinations. This Indicator does not apply to provision that is subject to the requirements of the Welsh Language Act (1993), for which QAA's *Guidelines for higher education institutions in Wales for effective practice in examining and assessing in a language other than the language of tuition* provides more appropriate guidance.

Arrangements involving provision through a delivery organisation are addressed in Indicator 15 of *Chapter B10: Managing higher education provision with others* of the Quality Code.

#### **Indicator 8**

##### **Assessment is designed and delivered inclusively.**

Higher education providers take an inclusive approach to assessment design and delivery - including assessment for RPL. This involves ensuring that assessment is designed in a way that meets the needs of all students at every stage of the assessment process, including those studying at different locations and through online arrangements, and those who possess one or more protected characteristics.

Reflecting the needs of students with protected characteristics in the design and approval of programmes reduces the likelihood of making one-off modifications to assessment in a reactive manner. Reliance on reactive modifications can place both students and staff under additional pressure and may lead to inequities.

Where individual modifications are required, they may prove beneficial if adopted for all students, within the limitations of practicality. In a similar way, consideration of a range of different means by which a particular learning outcome may be demonstrated may lead to overall enhancements of the assessment process.

Higher education providers monitor and evaluate inclusive assessment practices across modules, programmes, and their academic departments, and incorporate the consequent learning into their policies and procedures. They facilitate staff having access to sources of advice, both from within the provider and externally, about inclusive assessment strategies and practices, as well as about the assessment implications for individual disabled students.



The design and approval of programmes is addressed in *Chapter B1: Programme design and approval* of the Quality Code.

## Conducting assessment

### Indicator 9

#### **Assessment is carried out equitably and securely.**

Staff carry out assessment in accordance with the regulations, policies and guidance of the degree-awarding body to ensure the integrity of assessment and the security of academic standards. Consistency of practice across all provision, irrespective of its form, location or subject, helps to provide students with an equitable experience of each aspect of the assessment process.

Particular attention is paid to:

- setting and applying deadlines for the submission of assessed work, and the penalties for work submitted late
- considering requests for extensions to deadlines
- the effectiveness of invigilation
- how and at what stage of the assessment process mitigating circumstances are considered
- how the integrity of assessment carried out under different circumstances (for example, during a work placement or a period of study abroad) can be assured, and how equitable treatment of students assessed in such circumstances can be achieved
- how security can be maintained where e-assessment is being used
- how to ensure equity in the reassessment process
- implementing reasonable adjustments for individual students based on protected characteristics.

Assessment is conducted in a way which ensures security at every stage of the assessment setting and marking process, with particular attention paid to the security of the assessment tasks and the students' submitted work. For example: questions for unseen examinations are not accessible in advance; draft questions and student work sent to an external examiner not being lost; and work removed from the provider's premises for marking in another location is handled securely.

### Indicator 10

#### **Students are provided with opportunities to develop an understanding of good academic practice.**

An understanding of what constitutes good academic practice, and of the types of activity which are unacceptable practice, is regarded as a fundamental part of the student learning process and of undertaking assessment that protects academic standards.

Staff recognise that providing information alone is often insufficient to enable students to develop a sound understanding. Activities that engage students in identifying and applying good practice reinforce information provided.

Particular attention is paid to: accepted and acceptable forms of academic referencing and citation; definitions of unacceptable practice/misconduct (including plagiarism, collusion, impersonation and the use of inadmissible material); the need for ethical standards to be met when carrying out assessment (this is of particular relevance in relation to projects and dissertations); and the use of appropriate software which can help develop an awareness of plagiarism.

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

The Higher Education Academy: Academic Integrity Service  
[www.heacademy.ac.uk/academic-integrity](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/academic-integrity)

#### **Indicator 11**

#### **Higher education providers implement fair and effective arrangements which enable academic misconduct to be detected and penalised.**

Ensuring that students do not obtain awards through any form of misconduct relating to assessment is fundamental to securing standards and is part of a commitment to all students who achieve their awards through fair means. Higher education providers therefore have in place effective measures to enable misconduct to be detected and penalised.

Detection is achieved in a range of ways appropriate to the nature of the assessment task. This may include the use of electronic submission and software that is able to identify matches between the content of assessed work and existing material, thus promoting the identification of plagiarism.

Higher education providers have clear processes through which allegations of misconduct can be made by anyone with relevant knowledge. These processes facilitate the gathering of evidence, and provide those who are the subject of allegations with the opportunity to put their case, test the evidence and offer any explanation or mitigation. Penalties for proven cases of misconduct are clear, proportionate and consistently and equitably applied. Students are made aware that in some subjects misconduct can have severe consequences for their career prospects, for example denial of entry into a particular profession because of the element of dishonesty attached to misconduct.

Higher education providers ensure that the requirements of PSRBs are taken into account, whether through reporting proven cases to them or involving them in determining individual cases.

The handling of individual cases takes account of the needs of any student with one or more protected characteristics.

Clear information is provided to all concerned about the rights of anyone involved in an allegation, including whether they are entitled to a hearing, to be accompanied or represented, and to appeal against the decision and/or penalties.

Effective processes for detection and penalty may also have a deterrent effect, especially if the consequences of misconduct are well publicised.

Appeals relating to academic misconduct are addressed in *Chapter B9: Academic appeals and student complaints* of the Quality Code.

## Marking and feedback

### Indicator 12

**Processes for marking assessments and for moderating marks are clearly stated, understood and consistently operated by those involved in the assessment process.**

Guidance to staff makes explicit the higher education provider's approach to and requirements for second marking. This includes making clear the information available to the second marker, such as the marks or comments of the first marker, whether the second marker is required to confirm the first mark or provide an independent mark, and what evidence is required in order to demonstrate that the second marking has taken place. It also includes defining how disagreements between markers will be resolved.

Internal moderation is a process separate from that of marking and provides assurance that assessment criteria have been applied appropriately, reflecting the shared understanding of the markers, and an approach which is comparable irrespective of the academic subject (in particular recognising that students may be studying more than one subject).

Moderation focuses on the marking of, and the marks awarded to, the full set of assessed work for a task or module, in the context of the academic standards for the award. It is therefore separate from the question of how differences in marks between two or more markers are resolved, or about making changes to an individual student's marks. Staff are clear how moderation will be conducted (for example, whether through sampling assessed work or through reviewing all the marks awarded) and what action might be taken (for example, where significant differences in marks awarded are identified). Clear guidance is also provided about the higher education provider's requirements in relation to moderating assessment that does not involve the production of physical evidence. Assessments of this kind include various types of performance or presentation.

Higher education providers consider:

- the need for clear guidance about how borderline marks or grades are defined and treated, both in individual assessments and in overall results for a module or a programme
- the circumstances where anonymous marking is appropriate and where it is either inappropriate or not practical (for example, in work-based assessment or in the performing arts). Where anonymity is used, procedures make clear the point at which anonymity is lifted (for example, before or after the examination board/assessment panel).

External scrutiny of marking and moderation is addressed in *Chapter B7: External examining* of the Quality Code.

### Indicator 13

**Feedback on assessment is timely, constructive and informative.**

While some assessment may be classed as entirely formative, most summative assessment also contains a formative element. Effective feedback combines information which enables students to understand the strengths and limitations of their past performance, and information which enables them to perceive how future performance can be improved.

Higher education providers' approaches to feedback recognise that the timing of the provision of feedback, and the return of assessed work when this is appropriate, contribute to making feedback effective. In particular they provide students with the time to be able to reflect on the feedback and consider how to make use of it, especially in forthcoming assessments. Where a specific turnaround time for the provision of feedback is agreed this is communicated to staff and students.

Staff employ a range of ways of communicating feedback which are effective in promoting learning and which can also enable them to maintain a reasonable workload. Examples of different approaches include: providing generic comments orally during a lecture or other learning session; providing anonymised examples of student work across the spectrum, from excellent to failing; discussing with students the reasons for the mark achieved; and making use of technological developments such as podcasts to provide feedback in an oral rather than a written format.

Higher education providers offer support to students to help them make the most effective use of feedback, as well as addressing student understanding of what constitutes feedback. This can take the form of encouragement to read and act on feedback; using peer assessment and feedback to help develop a greater awareness of the way that work is assessed against the criteria; or requiring reflection on feedback as part of the following piece of assessment. Emphasis on teacher-student and student-student dialogue may be productive in increasing students' understanding.

Students receive both formative and summative feedback on assessment for RPL, both where an application has been accepted and where it has been rejected. In the case of rejection, feedback helps the student to understand the reasons for the rejection and helps the student to make an informed decision, for example in relation to any right of appeal or future study.

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

The Higher Education Academy: Assessment and feedback  
[www.heacademy.ac.uk/assessment](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assessment)

## **Examination boards and other assessment panels**

### **Indicator 14**

**Higher education providers apply clear regulations for progression within a programme and for the attainment of an award.**

Higher education providers state clearly the level of achievement required in order for students to progress from one stage to another within their programme of study. Such statements include the number of reassessments permitted, and whether any limit is placed on the maximum marks which can be achieved in a reassessment. They also indicate whether or not it is possible for a student to progress to the next

stage of the award while 'trailing' a failed unit or module, and make clear any pre-requisite or co-requisite requirements.

Where appropriate, the requirements of specific subjects, which may reflect professional accreditation or practice needs, are addressed through variations approved by the degree-awarding body which ensure equity and that academic standards are not jeopardised. Differences are made clear to applicants and students from the outset of their programme, in particular where certain modules must be passed in order to obtain professional accreditation.

Provision is also made for exceptional circumstances, such as students who are suffering from long-term ill-health or other adverse personal circumstances, or those who for good reason wish to defer assessment or temporarily withdraw from a programme. Any time limits for completion of the programme are clear, and take account of the need to enable equity of opportunity.

Clear information concerning the regulations on progression and awards is available to staff and students, providing clarity about the ways in which assessment results will be used; how they will impact on the student's ability to progress from one stage to another within their programme of study; and how they will contribute to the outcome of the programme as a whole. This might include offering students access to software that enables them to track progress through their programme and the accumulation of credit (where relevant).

Degree-awarding bodies review their progression regulations periodically to assure themselves that the regulations continue to be fit for purpose. In considering when to introduce changes to the regulations, degree-awarding bodies consider the impact of changes on current students and whether changes should only be introduced for new students. Changes that are likely to have a negative impact on current students are introduced only in exceptional circumstances.

#### **Indicator 15**

**Membership, procedures, powers and accountability of examination boards and assessment panels, including those dealing with the recognition of prior learning, are clearly specified, and this information is available to all members of such boards.**

Degree-awarding bodies operate, or oversee the operation of, examination boards and/or assessment panels (however titled) for making judgments and decisions on which the award of credit and qualifications is ultimately based. These boards/panels therefore have a particularly important responsibility for the maintenance of standards. For this reason all members of such bodies, particularly chairs, are clear about the extent of the powers and authority of the panel/board, including to whom it is accountable, and the regulations governing progression.

There are often different tiers of examination boards or assessment panels; for example, where one tier is responsible for deciding on the mark or grade a student should receive for an individual module, and the other tier is responsible for deciding on the student's progression to the next stage of the programme, or on the final result based on the full set of marks. Where there is more than one such board or panel, the relative powers and responsibilities of each are clearly stated and understood by those involved.

Regulations, policies or procedures make explicit the degree-awarding body's requirements relating to: membership of internal and external examiners and other staff, and attendance at meetings, of each board/panel; how the views of those unable to attend might be recorded; the quorum for meetings and how inquoracy will be dealt with; provision for Chair's action, its limitations and the recording and reporting of such decisions; the exercise of discretion in a consistent manner by individual boards/panels, for example in relation to exceptional or mitigating circumstances, or borderline cases.

Clear provision is made to enable potential conflicts of interest - such as personal interests or involvements with students - to be identified and addressed. This might involve the making of a declaration at the beginning of a meeting, or a board/panel member not participating in part or all of the decision-making. Recognising potential conflicts of interest is particularly important where members of staff of the provider are also students on one of its programmes. Conflicts of interest can be mitigated where those with line management responsibility for the member of staff, or other close working relationships, are not involved in those assessment decisions.

Degree-awarding bodies make explicit their arrangements, including where the authority lies, for making decisions to recognise learning derived from experience and/or prior certificated study, and the procedures to be followed. While these decisions are not generally made by examination boards or assessment panels, processes are defined and followed with equal rigour and transparency. This may be achieved through dedicated RPL boards/panels whether at degree-awarding body or subject level. The roles of those involved, including individual assessors, board/panel members and external examiners are explicit and understood.

The role and responsibilities of external examiners are addressed in *Chapter B7: External examining* of the Quality Code.

Responsibilities of the degree-awarding body and delivery organisation where one is involved are addressed in *Chapter B10: Managing higher education with others*.

#### **Indicator 16**

**The decisions of examination boards and assessment panels, including those relating to the recognition of prior learning, are recorded accurately, and communicated to students as soon as possible.**

Examination boards/assessment panels are responsible for ensuring that assessment decisions are recorded accurately, supported by taking adequate minutes of any discussions which, in particular, demonstrate the factors taken into account when discretion is exercised or exceptional circumstances considered. Such an approach provides assurance and transparency.

Clear statements of the responsibilities of all those involved in computation and checking of results and recording of assessment decisions are provided. Where assessment data are stored, processed and transmitted electronically, systems for back-up in case of a failure of equipment are in place. Policies on access to information regarding assessment judgments about individuals are also clearly stated.

As the availability of reliable records of examination board deliberations can be essential in the event of an academic appeal or student complaint, and when helping

to demonstrate that assessment processes are properly applied, higher education

providers implement an explicit policy detailing the length of time for which records of decisions and student results will be retained (including those relating to RPL).

Students and staff are clear about when and how results - including those for RPL claims - will be provided, and about whom students can contact should they require clarification of their results or advice on decisions affecting their future study. Particular attention is paid to ensuring support for students where the release of results takes place during vacations or for students who are away from the location of delivery.

When results are provided, they include clear information about whether each result is final or whether it is subject to confirmation by an assessment panel or examination board, whose decision may include input from an external examiner or another body such as the highest academic authority of the degree-awarding body. Where students receive provisional results, it is important that they are not in any doubt about the standing of the results and, if they are not final, how and when they will be ratified. Clarification of the status of the results ensures that students are clear about when time limits for lodging an academic appeal or complaint start.

Decisions relating to RPL may not follow a set timescale in the same way as other assessment decisions. It is therefore important that students who apply for RPL are clear about the timescales involved and the means by which they will be informed of the outcome. Each decision is explicit about the level and volume of credit being awarded (where that is the case) and whether it relates to a specific module or modules, or programme level outcomes, or whether it is general credit to be counted towards an overall programme.

Part C: Information about higher education provision of the Quality Code addresses the provision of information for students on their academic achievements.

Academic appeals and student complaints are addressed in *B9: Academic appeals and student complaints* of the Quality Code.

## Information and support for those applying for recognition of prior learning

### Indicator 17

**Those who might be eligible for recognition of prior learning (including currently registered students) are made aware of the opportunities available, and are supported throughout the process of application and assessment.**

Higher education providers consider how they make potential applicants for RPL aware that their learning, whether already certificated or informal, might be eligible for recognition. They also determine, and publicise, any costs of applying and the periods of time during which they will consider applications: only prior to the start of the programme, within a designated period after the start of the programme, or at any time during the programme (bearing in mind that part-time students in particular may be engaged in employment or other activity in parallel with their studies and which may be generating relevant learning).

The precise form of support offered to those seeking RPL will vary according to the higher education provider's approach to prior learning and the nature and number of claims it receives. In general, applicants find it useful to be engaged in discussion and negotiation about the form(s) of assessment to be used in their case, and to be provided with an explanation of the learning that would need to be evidenced and the nature of the evidence to be provided.

Assessment of portfolios is widely used by higher education providers. Guidance on portfolio preparation may address such factors as the nature and volume of the evidence to be included, requirements as to its currency, and any necessity for independent verification of evidence.

Support for those making a claim may be provided during the process in the form of a short course or a module that prepares applicants to reflect upon their experiences and describe and analyse their learning, or via individual support and tools that help applicants to reflect upon their experiences and identify and evidence the learning gained from those experiences.



# Appendix 1: The Expectation and Indicators

## The Expectation

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

**Higher education providers have in place equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment, including for the recognition of prior learning, which enable every student to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the award.**

## The Indicators of sound practice

### Indicator 1

To secure the academic standards of awards, higher education providers have effective procedures for:

- implementing rigorous assessment policies and practices that ensure the standard for each award is set and maintained at the appropriate level, and that ensure student performance is equitably judged against this standard
- designing, approving, monitoring and reviewing all forms of assessment, including those for the assessment of prior learning
- evaluating how effectively their assessment practice maintains academic standards and promotes effective learning.

### Indicator 2

Assessment principles, regulations and processes, including those for the recognition of prior learning, are explicit, transparent and accessible to all intended audiences.

### Indicator 3

Higher education providers assure themselves that everyone involved in assessment processes, including the recognition of prior learning, is suitably qualified, supported and developed.

### Indicator 4

Assessment and feedback practices are informed by reflection, evaluation of professional practice, and subject-specific and educational scholarship.

### Indicator 5

The volume, timing and nature of assessment enables students to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes.

### Indicator 6

The standards and criteria against which judgments on assessment and the recognition of prior learning will be made are provided to students and to staff involved in the assessment process.

**Indicator 7**

The language in which assessment is conducted is normally that used in the associated teaching. Where this is not the case, higher education providers assure themselves that academic standards are not compromised.

**Indicator 8**

Assessment is designed and delivered inclusively.

**Indicator 9**

Assessment is carried out equitably and securely.

**Indicator 10**

Students are provided with opportunities to develop an understanding of good academic practice.

**Indicator 11**

Higher education providers implement fair and effective arrangements which enable academic misconduct to be detected and penalised.

**Indicator 12**

Processes for marking assessments and for moderating marks are clearly stated, understood and consistently operated by those involved in the assessment process.

**Indicator 13**

Feedback on assessment is timely, constructive and informative.

**Indicator 14**

Higher education providers apply clear regulations for progression within a programme and for the attainment of an award.

**Indicator 15**

Membership, procedures, powers and accountability of examination boards and assessment panels, including those dealing with the recognition of prior learning, are clearly specified, and this information is available to all members of such boards.

**Indicator 16**

The decisions of examination boards and assessment panels, including those relating to the recognition of prior learning, are recorded accurately, and communicated to students as soon as possible.

**Indicator 17**

Those who might be eligible for recognition of prior learning (including currently registered students) are made aware of the opportunities available, and are supported throughout the process of application and assessment.

## Appendix 2: Membership of the advisory group for this chapter

<b>Name</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>
Dr Rachel Banfield	Dean of Professional Higher Education	Ifs School of Finance
Professor Sue Bloxham	Professor of Academic Practice & Director of Educational Research	University of Cumbria
Professor Sally Brown	Independent Consultant	
Dr Tim Burton	Assistant Director	QAA (Chair)
Dr Judith Foreman	Dean of Higher Education	Wakefield College
Heather Gibson	Development Officer	QAA Scotland
Professor Paddy Gray	Professor of Housing	University of Ulster
Dr Pam Harris	Dean of Quality and Standards	Cardiff Metropolitan University
Mineke Lamean*	Inspector of Higher Education	Netherlands University Inspectorate
Dr Carolyn Mackintosh-Franklin	Head, School of Health Sciences	Liverpool University
Professor Liz McDowell	Independent Consultant	
Dr Erica Morris	Academic Lead	Higher Education Academy
Clare Morris	Independent Consultant and QAA Specialist Author	
Dominic Passfield	Development Officer	QAA (Secretariat)
Steve Partridge	Accreditation Officer	University of Hertfordshire
Helen Pokorny	Associate, Institute for Learning Enhancement	University of Westminster
Raul Ranne*	Coordinator of recognition of prior learning Chair, European RPL Network	Archimedes Foundation, Tartu, Estonia

Mike Wray	Learning Support Service Manager	York St John University
Harvey Woolf	Student Assessment and Classification Working Group	University of Wolverhampton
Professor Ruth Whittaker	Head of Learning Enhancement and Academic Development	Glasgow Caledonian University
Kate Wicklow	Head of Student Engagement and Quality	National Union of Students

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