



UK Quality Code for Higher Education

Part B: Assuring and enhancing academic quality

Chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review

Draft for consultation

May 2013

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2013

ISBN 978 1 84979 862 4

All QAA's publications are available on our website www.qaa.ac.uk

Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Contents

Contents	3
About the Quality Code	1
About this Chapter	2
Programme monitoring and review.....	3
Cyclical processes.....	3
Effective processes	3
Continuous engagement and promoting enhancement.....	4
Terminology.....	4
External links	5
Expectation	5
Indicators of sound practice	6
The purpose and nature of programme monitoring and review	6
Involvement in programme monitoring and review.....	9
Appendix 1: The Expectation and Indicators	12
The Expectation	12
The Indicators of sound practice.....	12
Appendix 2: Membership of the advisory group for this Chapter	13

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.¹ 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.²

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*³ to the Quality Code 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.

¹ www.qaa.ac.uk/qualitycode.

² www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review.

³ 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 (Code of practice), Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review* (2006), published by QAA, as it relates to programme monitoring and review, and forms a Chapter of the Quality Code. Programme design and approval are addressed in *Chapter B1: Programme design and approval* of the Quality Code.

The evaluation of the Academic Infrastructure and consultation on subsequent changes identified the need for the Quality Code which was developed as a result to have a clear structure, based on the student life cycle.⁴ *Chapter B1* addresses the initial development of a programme and processes which lead to a decision by the degree-awarding body that it can be delivered in the agreed form. *Chapter B8* discusses the mechanisms which higher education providers use to reflect on the programme once it is running, and to determine how it can be improved.

⁴ *Changes to the Academic Infrastructure: final report* (June 2011):
www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/changes-to-academic-infrastructure.aspx.

Programme monitoring and review

UK higher education is based on the principle of the autonomy and responsibility of the degree-awarding body for the academic standards and quality of learning opportunities of the programmes it offers and the awards it makes. The monitoring and review of programmes are essential processes within higher education providers' internal quality assurance mechanisms which enable that responsibility to be exercised and form a fundamental part of the academic cycle.

The processes of programme monitoring and review ensure that the provider's academic provision has made, and continues to make, available to students appropriate learning opportunities which enable the intended learning outcomes of the programme to be achieved. They also evaluate student attainment of academic standards and allow higher education providers to confirm that their portfolio aligns with their mission and strategic priorities. This Chapter addresses the operation and effectiveness of these processes. It is relevant to all higher education providers, as it offers guidance on how monitoring and review processes enable providers to consider how the learning and teaching experience for students may be improved. However, ultimate responsibility for academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities rests with degree-awarding bodies. The extent to which roles and responsibilities for programme monitoring and review are devolved to the organisations with whom the degree-awarding body works to deliver provision leading to its awards is defined in the agreement between the organisations (for further detail, see Part A: Setting and maintaining academic standards and *Chapter B10: Managing higher education provision with others* of the Quality Code).

Cyclical processes

Programme monitoring and review offer an opportunity for higher education providers to reflect on the learning opportunities students have experienced and their continuing currency and relevance. Through programme design and approval (addressed in *Chapter B1*), higher education providers set aims for the programme; through monitoring and review, the provider considers to what extent those aims have been achieved. Programme monitoring and review also provide opportunities to ensure the student voice has been heard and to respond to student feedback and feedback from other stakeholders such as employers.

This Chapter addresses the processes for both monitoring and review, as they share many common themes and features while differing in scale. Programme monitoring or review processes may lead the higher education provider to reconsider the design of a programme. Higher education providers are also clear about the circumstances in which a programme is required to be re-approved, whether as a result of significant changes over time or if time limits on the original approval have expired. This Chapter is therefore closely linked to *Chapter B1*, as part of the cyclical nature of higher education.

Effective processes

UK higher education providers are diverse, and each has processes for programme monitoring and review which reflect individual missions and goals, while also ensuring the security of academic standards and quality of learning opportunities. These processes are clearly set out in ways which make evident their application to the higher education providers' context. Higher education providers apply their processes systematically and operate them consistently; the processes are capable of being applied to all higher education offered by a provider, but respect differences between subjects, modes and levels of study. Processes are not unduly burdensome or complicated, taking into account an assessment of the risks involved, and an appropriate level of resource is made available to

ensure that the required outcomes of the process are achieved. The processes are based on evidence, and operate in a transparent way.

Programme monitoring and review may draw on information from many different areas within the higher education provider, including academic departments and professional services. Within the remit of the Quality Code, this Chapter addresses monitoring and review of academic provision, although many of its themes will also be relevant to the evaluation of other areas of the provider, such as professional services.

Continuous engagement and promoting enhancement

Programme monitoring and review are particular stages within an ongoing process, and are not isolated events but part of a continuous engagement by staff and students with a programme. They provide a formal opportunity for higher education providers to reflect on their academic provision and consider how it may be changed to improve the student learning experience. The processes provide assurance, and identify any problems which need to be resolved, but also enable good practice to be identified, built upon and shared, providing opportunities for continuous improvement of the programme and the student experience. Higher education providers ensure that processes are designed in such a way to enable this balance between assurance and enhancement to be achieved.

Terminology

In this Chapter, as throughout the Quality Code, **programme** is used to describe any stand-alone, approved curriculum followed by a student, which carries academic credit or otherwise contributes to an award of the degree-awarding body. The provision may be of any length or credit value, and includes pre-defined programmes leading to a specific qualification, multidisciplinary programmes, pathways through a modular scheme, short periods of study leading to the award of academic credit, as well as programmes where the specific content is negotiated between the higher education provider and an individual student. In general terms, the Chapter applies to provision at all levels of the national higher education qualifications frameworks. Individual higher education providers determine the extent to which their processes for programme monitoring and review are applicable to research degree provision, which is considered in more detail in *Chapter B11: Research degrees*, and to other awards which do not carry academic credit.

Where a programme is made up of more than one self-contained, formally structured unit, these units are described as **modules**. Much of this Chapter may also be applied, proportionately as appropriate, to modules in their own right.

Reflecting conventional use within the UK higher education sector, **monitoring** refers to a regular, routine process. It may take place annually (and be described as annual monitoring or annual review) or at shorter or longer intervals and provides a check on ongoing learning and teaching provision at an operational level. **Review** occurs less frequently, but periodically and to an agreed cycle, commonly of five or six years; it is often referred to as periodic review. It typically has a broader remit and is informed by a view of trends over time. In both cases, the unit of learning under consideration may be a module or group of modules or a programme or group of programmes, or monitoring and review may take place at the organisational level. The review of a programme may be related to its re-approval (addressed in *Chapter B1*).

Higher education providers may use different terminology to that adopted in this Chapter or use the same terminology in different ways in relation to monitoring and review, reflecting

their individual history and approach. Higher education providers are clear about how terminology is used within the context of their own processes.

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, institutions may wish to consider the indicative lists of further guidelines, references and resources. QAA takes no responsibility for the content of external websites.

Expectation

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

Higher education providers have in place effective processes for the routine monitoring and periodic review of programmes.

Indicators of sound practice

The purpose and nature of programme monitoring and review

Indicator 1

Higher education providers maintain strategic oversight of the processes for, and outcomes of, programme monitoring and review.

Coordination

Programme monitoring and review take place in a planned cycle based on a transparent rationale. This ensures that all provision is monitored and reviewed adequately but without unnecessary duplication or overlap, for example when a broader range of provision than a single programme is being considered. The way in which processes are implemented also enables higher education providers to monitor or review all the ways in which a programme is experienced by students, whether in alternative forms of delivery (for example, by distance learning) or within different programme pathways. For further detail on monitoring and review of provision offered in association with others, see *Chapter B10: Managing higher education provision with others*.

The outcomes of regular programme monitoring are taken into account when determining plans for less frequent periodic review, for example in relation to timing and scope. Newly introduced programmes may be reviewed at a shorter interval than those that have been running for some time. Higher education providers also aim to coordinate the requirements for and timing of monitoring and review with those of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies where appropriate.

Organisational oversight

The outcomes of the processes of monitoring and review are reported at the appropriate organisational level. Higher education providers put in place mechanisms which enable oversight to be taken of the outcomes of the processes, in order to identify any overarching themes, and determine whether strategic action is required to address the themes identified.

The level of scrutiny and reporting involved in the processes of programme monitoring and review is proportionate to the scale of provision being considered. Higher education providers are able to confirm that action has been taken to implement recommendations made in previous cycles of monitoring or processes for review, or at the approval of the programme.

Indicator 2

Higher education providers take deliberate steps in using the outcomes of programme monitoring and review processes for enhancement purposes.

Enabling enhancement

The purpose of programme monitoring or review is to consider the continuing currency and validity of programmes in light of developments in research, professional and industry practice and pedagogy (including the use of technology in learning and teaching), changes in the external environment such as requirements of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies, and continued alignment with the provider's strategy and mission.

They also evaluate whether students are attaining the intended learning outcomes and whether the assessment regime enables this to be appropriately demonstrated (see further *Chapter B6: Assessment of students and accreditation of prior learning*). The processes highlight where improvements to provision are possible in order to enhance the student learning experience.

Changes to programmes

Programme monitoring and review identify where such changes may be made and how they may be acted upon. Higher education providers ensure that there are no unnecessary barriers, perceived or actual, to making changes to enhance a programme.

However, higher education providers also take oversight of the effect of changes on the maintenance of academic standards and the assurance of the quality of learning opportunities. Changes vary in scale and effect, and higher education providers clearly define how they distinguish between different types of change and the process and level of authority needed to agree them. This includes a clear definition of the circumstances in which a programme needs to be reconsidered through any stages of the provider's programme approval processes (see *Chapter B1: Programme design and approval*).

Higher education providers have in place mechanisms which enable them to consider the cumulative effect of small changes to programmes, to ensure that the programmes continue to align with their aims and that the criteria for programme design and approval are still met.

When significant changes are made to the content and/or character of a programme, or to the title of the award, higher education providers take into account the effect on the student learning experience and consult all students affected. They consider how the changes may be implemented while maintaining the quality of learning opportunities, which may include introducing them on a phased basis if necessary.

Indicator 3

Higher education providers take due account of the interests of students when a programme is withdrawn.

Programme closure

A higher education provider may decide to withdraw a programme from their portfolio of provision, either as an outcome of programme monitoring or review, or for other reasons. A number of factors may contribute to this decision, including changes in patterns of demand from prospective students, changes in staffing or a strategic realignment of the provider's portfolio. In these circumstances, higher education providers discuss the implications with students at the earliest opportunity and assess the possible impact, particularly with regard to particular groups of students, taking into account the diversity of protected characteristics and prior educational experience.

Higher education providers have an agreed and planned procedure for managing the withdrawal of a programme, which includes steps taken to protect the interests of all students already studying on the programme (including those who have taken an agreed break from their studies) and those who have been accepted to study on it. The quality of the learning experience is maintained during the period in which the programme is being withdrawn. Other organisations with whom the higher education provider works to offer the programme are notified of the decision (see further *Chapter B10: Managing higher education provision with others*).

Where programme monitoring or review identify reasons which suggest a programme may need to be withdrawn, but a decision is made to continue to offer the programme (for example, to maintain the breadth of a portfolio of provision in line with a provider's strategy), higher education providers take account of the consequences of such a decision for students on this and other programmes, for example in relation to the learning environment and resources.

Circumstances may arise in which the decision to withdraw a programme is beyond a higher education provider's control, but the existence of a planned withdrawal procedure enables providers to manage this situation to protect the interests of students as far as possible.

Indicator 4

Higher education providers regularly evaluate their processes for programme monitoring and review and take action to improve them where necessary.

The regular evaluation of processes for programme monitoring and review ensures that the processes remain fit for purpose and are not unnecessarily burdensome, and that their outcomes continue to contribute to the enhancement of the student learning experience. Evaluation provides an opportunity to identify and disseminate good practice, both within and externally to the higher education provider. Higher education providers consider the definition of roles and responsibilities and any delegation of authority within the processes and whether these remain efficient and are operating effectively. Higher education providers seek student input to the evaluation, which also takes into account the extent to which students from diverse backgrounds and with a range of protected characteristics have engaged with the processes. Higher education providers communicate the outcomes of the evaluation and any changes made to processes to all relevant audiences, including staff and students involved in programme monitoring or review.

Further guidelines, references and resources

Irish Universities Quality Board (2012) *National Guidelines of Good Practice for the Approval, Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes*
www.iuqb.ie/info/good_practice_guides.aspx?article=4b9d7b37-0b78-4dc9-a577-f423d2524ed0

QAA (2011) *Outcomes from Institutional Audit 2007-09: External involvement in quality management*
www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Outcomes-from-audit-external-involvement.aspx

QAA (2011) *Outcomes from Institutional Audit 2007-09: Managing learning opportunities*
www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/outcomes-audit-learning-ops.aspx

Higher Education Statistics Agency (2011) *What is a course?*
www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2353&Itemid=161

Regulatory Partnership Group (2013) *Supplementary paper 3: International student protection*
www.hefce.ac.uk/media/hefce/content/about/introduction/workinginpartnership/rpg/march13/March_2013_sp3.pdf

Involvement in programme monitoring and review

Indicator 5

Higher education providers define processes, roles and responsibilities for programme monitoring and review and communicate these to those who need to be aware of them.

Higher education providers make clear the processes, including any distinctions between them, to be followed for the monitoring and review of programmes. They determine who is responsible for initiating and managing the processes, and the timescales involved. Attention is paid to the terminology used, to aid clear understanding. Higher education providers determine responsibility for identifying, disseminating and embedding good practice through the processes.

Programme monitoring and review processes may be managed from different organisational areas within the higher education provider, depending on the nature and scale of provision under consideration. Higher education providers ensure that responsibility for coordination of the process is clearly defined, and that all those connected with the programme have the opportunity to be involved, for example, if a programme involves staff from more than one academic department.

Higher education providers decide the appropriate mechanism for recording and communicating this information. They make it accessible to those who need to be aware of it, which includes members of decision-making bodies and other individuals involved in any stage of programme monitoring and review processes, including their strategic oversight (see further Part C: Information about higher education provision).

Use of data

Higher education providers draw upon their own management information in programme monitoring and review. This includes data on student progression and achievement and information made publicly available or reported to external bodies including professional, regulatory and statutory bodies, and other data available within the higher education provider.

Indicator 6

Higher education providers take account of reference points and draw on expertise from those outside the programme in their processes for programme monitoring and review.

Expertise from outside the programme

Feedback on programmes enables higher education providers to identify areas for improvement and enhancement, as well as offering assurance of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. Possible sources of feedback in addition to current and former students and staff of the higher education provider directly involved with the programme include:

- staff of the higher education provider, or of organisations with whom they work to offer higher education, who are not directly linked to the programme
- external examiners and their reports (see *Chapter B7: External examining*)
- professional, statutory and regulatory bodies

- employers, who may be directly involved in the programme, for example in offering placement opportunities, or have employed students who had previously studied on the programme.

Higher education providers also draw on relevant sector networks, such as those concerned with developments in pedagogy and technology-enhanced learning.

Higher education providers ensure that individuals external to the higher education provider involved in programme monitoring or review are appropriately qualified, in terms of their expertise in relation to the programme, and are provided with clear information on the process and their role within it.

The nature and extent of external input to programme monitoring and review is proportionate to the scale of the process involved. For example, periodic review draws on a wider external contribution than ongoing monitoring.

National and international reference points

Alignment with national and international reference points ensures the academic standards set for a programme are appropriate. Relevant reference points include the national higher education qualifications frameworks and subject and qualification benchmark statements. Processes relating to academic standards are addressed in detail in Part A: Setting and maintaining academic standards.

Programme monitoring and review processes enable higher education providers to consider whether the intended learning outcomes of the programme continue to align with relevant national and international reference points.

Indicator 7

Higher education providers engage students in programme monitoring and review processes.

Students are a primary source of information about the programmes on which they are studying or have studied. Higher education providers actively seek feedback from students about their learning experience on an ongoing basis and at specified points in the academic cycle. Providers take into account views of students at different points of the programme and take steps to engage a range of students, who reflect the diversity of protected characteristics. Feedback is collected through a range of different mechanisms.

Students are involved in programme monitoring and review in both formal and informal ways. Where any student representative body has a defined role within the process, higher education providers ensure that its input reflects the views of the student body as a whole. Higher education providers facilitate the contribution of all students by making arrangements for appropriate training and support.

Feedback from students about their programme is distinguished from complaints on academic matters and this distinction is made clear to students. However, higher education providers feed any themes arising from complaints and appeals into relevant monitoring or review processes (see *Chapter B9: Academic appeals and student complaints*).

Student involvement in quality systems is addressed in more detail in *Chapter B5: Student engagement*. Student engagement in learning is addressed further in *Chapter B3: Learning and teaching*.

Indicator 8

Higher education providers enable staff to contribute effectively to programme monitoring and review by putting in place appropriate arrangements for their support and development.

Higher education providers recognise the wider value of staff engagement with programme monitoring and review in terms of the overall enhancement of provision by putting in place opportunities for training, support and development. Members of staff who are new to the process are enabled to work alongside more experienced colleagues to observe the processes in operation.

Staff involved in contributing to programme monitoring and review are drawn from across the higher education provider and from the organisations with whom the provider works, including academic and professional services staff. Higher education providers ensure that all those involved are aware of their responsibilities and are able to fulfil their role effectively.

Further guidelines, references and resources

JISC: Institutional approaches to curriculum design, *The Rough Guide to Curriculum Design*
<http://jiscdesignstudio.pbworks.com/w/file/63018351/The%20Rough%20Guide%20to%20Curriculum%20Design%20Narrative%20Version%20-%20PBFinalEdit%20OJFormattingEdit.pdf>

JISC: Institutional approaches to curriculum design, Viewpoints
<http://wiki.ulster.ac.uk/display/VPR/Home>

JISC: Institutional approaches to curriculum design, Cloudworks
<http://cloudworks.ac.uk/cloudscape/view/1882>

JISC (2012) *Institutional Approaches to Curriculum Design: Final Synthesis Report*
<https://files.pbworks.com/download/JilpvLhMpf/jiscdesignstudio/61216296/JISC%20Curriculum%20Design%20Final%20Synthesis%20i1.pdf>

JISC Design Studio: Curriculum Change and Transformation
<http://jiscdesignstudio.pbworks.com/w/page/57414310/Curriculum%20Change%20and%20Transformation>

Learning Design Support Environment
<https://sites.google.com/a/lkl.ac.uk/ldse/>

UK Professional Standards Framework
www.heacademy.ac.uk/ukpsf

National Union of Students
www.nus.org.uk

sparqs (2012) *A student engagement framework for Scotland*
www.sparqs.ac.uk/section.php?cat=148

WISE: Wales Initiative for Student Engagement
www.wisewales.com/

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 effective processes for the routine monitoring and periodic review of programmes.

The Indicators of sound practice

Indicator 1

Higher education providers maintain strategic oversight of the processes for, and outcomes of, programme monitoring and review.

Indicator 2

Higher education providers take deliberate steps in using the outcomes of programme monitoring and review processes for enhancement purposes.

Indicator 3

Higher education providers take due account of the interests of students when a programme is withdrawn.

Indicator 4

Higher education providers regularly evaluate their processes for programme monitoring and review and take action to improve them where necessary.

Indicator 5

Higher education providers define processes, roles and responsibilities for programme monitoring and review and communicate these to those who need to be aware of them.

Indicator 6

Higher education providers take account of reference points and draw on expertise from those outside the programme in their processes for programme monitoring and review.

Indicator 7

Higher education providers engage students in programme monitoring and review processes.

Indicator 8

Higher education providers enable staff to contribute to programme monitoring and review by putting in place appropriate arrangements for support and development.

Appendix 2: Membership of the advisory group for this Chapter

Name	Position	Affiliation
Janet Alleyne	Head of Quality Management and Audit Unit	University of Ulster
Harriet Barnes	Development Officer	QAA
Janet Bohrer	Assistant Director	QAA
Dr Richard Brown	Assistant Director of Quality & Standards (Programmes and Awards)	Canterbury Christ Church University
Professor Peter Bullen	Emeritus Professor	University of Hertfordshire
Dr Colleen Connor	Dean of Learning and Teaching	Cardiff Metropolitan University
Tom Evershed	Higher Education Manager	Warwickshire College
Rebecca Freeman	Educational Strategy and Communications Officer	University of Warwick
Dr Richard Kamm	Head of Learning and Teaching Quality, School of Management	University of Bath
Dr Christine Macpherson	Assistant Director	QAA Scotland
Professor Clare Morris	Independent	
Dr Charles Neame	Undergraduate Coordinator	Glasgow School of Art
Aloma Onyemah	Equality and Diversity Officer	Sheffield Hallam University
Nicola Owen	Chief Administrative Officer	Lancaster University
Dr Anne Rixom	Head of Operations, London	University of Liverpool
Jessica Robinson	Head of Academic Quality and Standards	University of Cumbria

QAA 526 05/13

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
Southgate House
Southgate Street
Gloucester
GL1 1UB

Tel 01452 557000
Fax 01452 557070
Email enquiries@qaa.ac.uk
Web www.qaa.ac.uk