



Higher Education Review: Themes for 2015-16

1 Background and introduction

Higher Education Review has a core element and a thematic element. The core element focuses on academic standards, quality of learning opportunities, information, and enhancement. The thematic element focuses on an area which is regarded as particularly worthy of further analysis or enhancement. The thematic element, or theme, is selected by the Higher Education Review Group - which includes representatives of the Higher Education Funding Council for England, Universities UK, GuildHE and Association of Colleges - and changes periodically. More information about the theme, including the role it plays in the review process, is provided in Higher Education Review handbook. This document announces the themes for 2015-16 and gives further information and guidance (for the benefit of providers in particular) about how these themes will feature in the review process.

2 The themes for 2015-16

The Higher Education Review Group has selected two themes for reviews happening in the academic year 2015-16: Student Employability, and Digital Literacy. Providers undergoing reviews in 2015-16 will be required to explore one of these themes. It is up to providers to decide which theme they would like to pursue in partnership with their student representatives. The choice of theme should be discussed with the QAA officer coordinating the review during the preparatory meeting held approximately 16 weeks before the review visit. The QAA officer will consider the provider's proposal and confirm within one week of the preparatory visit that the proposal is acceptable. Only where there is a disagreement between the provider and its student representatives about the choice of theme would QAA consider not accepting the provider's proposal.

3 Rationale for the themes identified

Student Employability

Student employability and the steps higher education providers take to improve the employability of their students and graduates have emerged as important areas for discussion both within higher education providers and in the wider community, reflected in recent national initiatives such as the CBI report *Tomorrow's Growth*.¹ Student employability is high on the educational and political agenda. This is fuelled by the impact of higher fees on students' expectations of course content and quality and the broader economic climate that graduates enter into, and is demonstrated by the emergence of a range of initiatives across the higher education sector such as volunteering accreditation, student employability award schemes and extracurricular activities that focus on the development of professional skills and student employability. There has also been a growth in higher education initiatives promoting the development of students' enterprise and entrepreneurial skills.

¹ CBI report *Tomorrow's Growth*, available at: www.cbi.org.uk/campaigns/skills-for-growth/tomorrows-growth-report/.

There is a long and productive track record of higher education providers working in partnership with employers to provide relevant programmes of study, opportunities for work-based learning and programmes designed for employees. Initiatives around student employability often enable providers to address local and regional employment requirements and support economic growth and development.

Despite the prominence of student employability within the educational environment there are, however, a number of challenges around the variation in the provision of resource for student employability across the higher education sector. These include the impact of technology, demography, the environment, globalisation, societal changes and social mobility, student and societal expectations and student engagement with student employability initiatives.

The prominence of student employability and the challenges in responding to the agenda impacts on the quality of a student's higher education experience and is worthy of further exploration and analysis

The theme of Student Employability, therefore, consolidates the work that providers are likely to be already undertaking to prepare their students for the workforce, whether through direct employment, or as entrepreneurs. It would reach beyond the territory covered in the various parts of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) that refer to student employability, to give providers the opportunity to present a fuller and more detailed picture of what they do to develop the employability and entrepreneurial skills of their students, and showcase examples of good practice. Topics covered might therefore include:

- exploration of current career services (where available) within higher education providers and the various methods providers adopt to develop student employability skills, enterprise skills, and entrepreneurial skills
- exploration of student employability initiatives delivered by providers, their effectiveness and their role in enhancing the students' experience
- exploration of how student employability is embedded in curriculum design and assessment, including skills development modules, the use and availability of placements within higher education courses and the steps taken by providers to help students think beyond their areas of study when considering and pursuing career options
- exploration of initiatives delivered by providers to promote enterprise and entrepreneurial skills
- exploration of the response by providers to national initiatives such as the *Higher Education Achievement Report*
- exploration of the links between employers, their representative organisations and higher education providers
- exploration of how providers facilitate skills development and professionalisation in the existing workforce.

Student Employability was also a theme in Higher Education Reviews of 2013-14 and 2014-15. The outcomes of the theme would provide an insight into student employability measures across the sector in 2013-16. This might be used as a basis for measuring change and developments in subsequent years, and for reviewing the impact of resources produced by QAA and others on institutional practice.

Digital Literacy

The importance of providers' approaches to enhancing digital literacy of their students and staff has been the subject of recent national initiatives including JISC's Developing digital

literacies e-learning programme, the Higher Education Academy's Digital literacies in the disciplines project, and the Higher Education Funding Council for England's Changing the learning landscape programme. The importance of enhancing digital literacy through, and in, higher education is driven by the expectations of students entering higher education with a range of technological backgrounds, the requirements of employers and professional bodies, and the priorities of the government and funding council. The sector's responsiveness to digital literacy is demonstrated through a broad range of initiatives, such as those focusing on strategic prioritisation, discipline-specific resources, interdisciplinary projects and extracurricular opportunities.

Higher education providers in the UK have a long track record of using digital technology to enhance their programme delivery, offer flexibility, widen access to their courses, and facilitate their research. Initiatives that enhance digital literacy have allowed providers to work innovatively to enhance both their higher education provision and the management of students and programmes through greater efficiency and capacity.

Higher education providers have benefitted from a significant amount of project funding from higher education bodies to support digital literacy initiatives but face challenges in mainstreaming new approaches across all higher education provision and discipline areas. Providers have made investments in both the physical and technical resources, and in the training and development of staff to support digitally enhanced programmes. Such investments are to the benefit of the students and the attributes they develop through their programmes, and to their eventual employers or profession. However, challenges arise from the need to maintain and update digital resources, upskill staff in new technologies, manage digital security, and revise programmes so they maintain their professional relevance.

The challenges posed by the digital literacy agenda apply to all higher education providers. The benefits add value to UK higher education and enhances its attraction to a global education market. The impact of digital technologies on the higher education experience - both of staff and students - has implications for the quality of learning and teaching. This makes digital literacy a valuable additional consideration during QAA reviews.

The theme of Digital literacy, therefore, consolidates the work that providers are likely to be already undertaking. It would reach beyond the territory covered in the various parts of the Quality Code that refer to digital skills, to give providers the opportunity to present a fuller and more detailed picture of what they do to develop the digital literacy in their students, and showcase examples of good practice. Topics covered might therefore include:

- exploration of digital literacy initiatives delivered by providers, their effectiveness and their role in enhancing the students' experience
- exploration of how digital literacy is contextualised, embedded in curriculum design and assessment, including skills development modules and the steps taken by providers to help students think about their digital skills development
- exploration of the providers' resource strategies for enhancing digital literacy including the development of teachers' digital literacy
- exploration of how providers manage and show leadership in their approaches to digital literacy
- exploration of providers' responses to national initiatives such as the JISC's Developing Digital Literacies programme
- exploration of the links between employers, their representative bodies and higher education providers to inform their use, and maintain the relevance, of digital technologies in their provision

- exploration of the links between employers, their representative bodies and higher education providers to inform their development, and maintain the relevance, of the digital literacy of their students
- exploration of how providers support students to develop digital literacy and digital skills that are flexible and adaptable to evolving work markets
- exploration of how providers facilitate digital skills development and professionalisation in the existing workforce.

Digital literacy is a new theme for 2015-16. The outcomes of the theme would provide a snapshot of approaches to digital literacy across the sector. This might be used as a basis for measuring change and developments in subsequent years, and for reviewing the impact of resources produced by QAA and others on institutional practice.

4 Operationalising the theme in the review process

Providers will be encouraged in their self-evaluation document, submitted in advance of the review, to emphasise any arrangements or activities relevant to the theme they choose. Similarly, in the student submission, student representative bodies will be encouraged to focus on the provider's arrangements with respect to the theme.

Reviewers, informed by the self-evaluation document and student submission, and using prompts included in the 'further guidance' provided in the Annexes below, will gain an understanding of the provider's approach to the theme area through the normal schedule of meetings and reading of institutional documentation. It is not anticipated that there will have to be meetings exclusively focused on the theme.

Each Higher Education Review report will reflect the team's findings in two ways. Firstly, in the various sections of the report the review team will detail as appropriate the provider's approach to topics covered by the theme. Secondly, the report from each Higher Education Review will contain a specific commentary on the provider's approach to the theme. The commentary will not lead to any specific separate judgements but will summarise the findings covered in the various sections of the report.

5 Aggregate reporting on the theme

In accordance with the expectation that there should be useful and timely good practice guidance for the sector resulting from the thematic element of Higher Education Review, QAA will produce a report on the outcomes of the theme. This will bring together the outcomes of all reviews addressing the theme in a format accessible to a wide audience. The report is likely to be published in early 2017. It is anticipated that the report will contribute to sector-wide enhancement activities.

6 Further information

Further information on the particular aspects of the themes that review teams will explore is provided in Annex A (on Student Employability) and Annex B (on Digital Literacy).

7 Reviewer training

The reviewer training programme will include generic training on the thematic element of review. Reviewers will be reminded that the further guidance is not intended to be a checklist, but is a mechanism by which QAA can assure itself that each provider has been subject to a consistent approach to the theme.

Annex A - Student employability: further guidance

Introduction

Student employability has become a much higher priority for higher education providers in recent years. This reflects a growth in public interest in the extent to which higher education is providing the professional skills needed by industry and society in general.

As the body of research and resources relating to the employability in higher education continues to develop, higher education providers are being given new perspectives about improving the employment prospects of their students and their graduates, and new evidence to support and guide them in refining what they do.

These resources include reflections on the professional currency of higher education programs in several chapters of the Quality Code, which are described below.

The new theme seeks to capture a picture of how higher education providers facilitate employability and entrepreneurial skills in the academic and supportive activities that they offer in the UK today. As an established but evolving area, it is intended to consolidate, where relevant, the work that higher education providers are undertaking to appraise their employment initiatives and activities, in the light of the new resources available to them. It will reach beyond the territory covered in the various chapters of the Quality Code to give higher education providers an opportunity to present a fuller and more detailed picture of initiatives and activities that promote and enhance employability and showcase examples of good practice.

Review teams will focus on two broad aspects of employability during the review. These have been identified as areas of particular interest for higher education providers:

- innovations in promoting the employability and entrepreneurial skills of students
- how employers are involved in the delivery and development of the curriculum.

This guidance highlights some context for each of these two areas, and the sorts of questions that reviewers might ask. It is intended to help providers and student representatives as they prepare their self-evaluation document and student submission, respectively. It will also provide an aide-memoire for reviewers during the review process.

It should be noted that there is potential for overlap between the two topics listed above. Providers are encouraged to approach each in the way that best reflects their activities.

Innovations in promoting the employability and entrepreneurial skills of students

Higher education providers employ a variety of mechanisms to support and promote employability and entrepreneurship. Recent reports from reviews of higher education suggest that most providers encourage the development and application of professional skills at a variety of levels, through liaison with employers and industry and the subsequent development of academic opportunities and enhancement initiatives.

Despite the prominence of student employability within the higher education sector there are a number of challenges. These include the variation in the provision of resource for employability and entrepreneurship across the higher education sector, the impact of technology, demography, the environment, globalisation, societal changes and social

mobility, student and societal expectations and student engagement with employability initiatives.

Reviewers might use the theme to explore how student employability is embedded in curriculum design and assessment, including skills development modules, the use and availability of placements within higher education courses and the steps taken by providers to help students think beyond their areas of study when considering and pursuing career options. Many higher education providers are also involved in employment and entrepreneurship related initiatives across the higher education sector that are intended to improve the employability and skills of students, graduates, and alumni. Reviewers might use the theme to explore provider engagement with these initiatives, their effectiveness and their role in enhancing the student experience. Reviewers might also use the theme to explore career services (where available) within higher education providers, support for alumni, and the various methods providers adopt to develop employability and entrepreneurial skills.

Possible review questions

- What steps does the provider take to enable their students to develop relevant employability skills across all courses?
- What use does the provider make of work-based and/or placement learning initiatives and opportunities to develop employability skills?
- What analysis does the provider undertake of first destination leaver statistics (and/or other related surveys)? How do providers use this analysis and how is it used to enhance learning opportunities?
- How do employability initiatives at a provider level work in helping graduates get and keep jobs?
- What steps does the provider take to enable their students to develop enterprise and entrepreneurial skills? How effective are these steps?

How employers are involved in the delivery and development of the curriculum

There is a long and productive track-record of higher education providers working in partnership with employers to provide relevant programmes of study, opportunities for work-based learning and programmes designed for employees. Recent reports from reviews of higher education suggest that many employers also contribute to the design of curricula and may be involved in course validation and review activities. Some employers are also involved in the delivery of learning opportunities and may have a role in the assessment and moderation of students' work. This liaison with employers can enable providers to address local and regional employment requirements and support economic growth and development. Reviewers might use the theme to explore links between employers, their representative organisations and higher education providers, how such links enhance student employability and how such links are monitored to ensure their currency.

Possible review questions

- How does the provider use externality in developing and delivering initiatives that enhance student employability?
- How actively does the provider engage employers/industry representatives in the development, design, assessment and review of higher education provision?

- How does the provider engage with distance learning, part-time and work-based higher education students to enhance student employability?
- How far do students/alumni agree that their studies are preparing/have prepared them for employment?

References in the Quality Code relevant to developing student employability and working with employers

A number of overarching themes are addressed throughout the Quality Code, as appropriate to the topic. These include:

- how the employability of students can be addressed in relation to the topic
- how the topic relates to all the diverse needs of students, in particular non-traditional learners (for example work-based learners, part-time students and so on).

Recognition of prior learning

- Learning achieved in a variety of settings, including in the workplace, may be capable of formal recognition for the purposes of entry to a programme or as part of a higher education programme being undertaken by a student. In the former case, reference should be made to *Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education*; where the learning is at the same level as the programme being undertaken (as defined in the FHEQ) reference should be made to *Chapter B6: Assessment of Students and the Recognition of Prior Learning*.

Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards

- The qualification descriptors for each level in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) include a section on 'qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment'.
- Subject benchmark statements may describe typical employment routes for graduates in the subject, particularly if there are specific and close links with particular professions, and/or professional, regulatory and statutory bodies.
- Subject benchmark statements also describe generic/transferable skills which students develop.

Chapter B1: Programme Design and Approval

- Indicators 1 and 5 list the requirements of employers as one of the external reference points to be taken into account in programme design and approval processes.
- Indicator 2 recognises employment as one of the purposes to be considered in designing and developing programmes.

Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching

- Indicator 1 refers to themes which cross subject boundaries which higher education providers may wish to consider as part of their strategic approach to learning and teaching; these include enterprise and entrepreneurship, and ethical behaviour.

- Indicator 3 refers to learning and teaching practices being informed by evaluation of professional practice, in particular where the 'teacher' is a 'practitioner' of a particular profession.

Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement

- The Expectation refers to enabling students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential.
- Indicator 6 focuses on the development of employability and career management skills.

Chapter B6: Assessment of Students and Accreditation of Prior Learning

- Indicator 4 identifies the need to ensure where employers or other providers involved in the process are complex to fulfil the designated role.

Chapter B7: External Examining

- Indicator 5 refers to external examiners drawn from business, industry or the professions.

Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review

- Indicator 1 lists feedback from employers who may be directly involved in the programme, for example, offering placement opportunities, or who have employed students who have previously studied on the programme to inform programme monitoring.
- Indicator 8 refers to where employers are involved in programme monitoring and review, providers ensure that they are aware of the responsibilities and are able to fulfil their role effectively.

Chapter B10: Managing Higher Education Provision with Others

- The Chapter provides guidance to providers who are working with others to offer higher education, including work with employers to deliver work-based and placement learning opportunities.

Chapter B11: Research Degrees

- Indicator 14 refers to students developing research, personal and professional skills and references the Vitae Researcher Development Framework (endorsed by QAA), which is a tool kit for career development of researchers.

Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

- Indicators 3, 4 and 5 refer to information for prospective and current students, which may include information about future employment prospects and opportunities during their studies for work-based and placement learning, and the development of transferable skills.
- Indicator 6 is about information about student achievement provided on completion of studies, one of the purposes of which is to provide evidence to a future employer.

Other relevant resources

Enterprise and entrepreneurship education: Guidance for UK higher education providers: www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/enterprise-entrepreneurship-guidance.pdf.

21 Century leaders - launched 1 June 2014, Chartered Management Institute research in collaboration with the Association of Business Leaders and QAA: www.managers.org.uk/Insights/Research/Current-research/2014/June/21st-Century-Leaders.aspx.

Extra-curricular awards stimulus papers:

- Centre for Recording Achievement perspective: www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/extra-curricular-awards-CRA.pdf
- Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services perspective: www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/extra-curricular-awards-AGCAS.pdf (note: particularly helpful discussion of what 'employability' may be understood to mean).

Recognising achievement beyond the curriculum: a toolkit for enhancing strategy and practice: www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/Recognising-achievement-beyond-the-curriculum-toolkit-13.pdf.

QAA Scotland Enhancement Themes:

- Graduates for the 21st Century: www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/enhancement-themes/completed-enhancement-themes/graduates-for-the-21st-century
- Flexible Delivery: www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/enhancement-themes/completed-enhancement-themes/flexible-delivery
- Employability: www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/enhancement-themes/completed-enhancement-themes/employability.

ASET Good Practice Guide for Work-based and Placement and Other Work-Based Learning Opportunities in Higher Education - launched 3 September 2013; produced in association with QAA: www.asetonline.org/documents/ASETCodeofPractice-Version2.1_000.pdf.

Annex B - Digital literacy: further guidance

Introduction

Digital literacies can be defined very broadly as those capabilities which fit an individual for living, learning and working in a digital society.² Digital literacy looks beyond functional IT skills to describe a richer set of digital behaviours, practices and identities. What it means to be digitally literate changes over time and across contexts, so digital literacy is essentially a set of academic and professional situated practices supported by diverse and changing technologies. The broad definition above can be used as a starting point to explore what key digital literacy is in a particular higher education context for example university, college, service department, subject area or professional environment.

Courses that embed digital literacy enable students to acquire the requisite skills and confidence and to use them, both in support of their learning, and to enhance their employment prospects and ability to learn and work in a digital society. It therefore enhances the professional relevance of many programmes. Technology-enhanced learning supports the development of digital literacy, for example, encouraging students to communicate through virtual networks, to carry out research using digital tools, to create data sets and to share information.

Digital technologies provide new opportunities to enhance teaching, learning, research and the management of organisations. Investing in the digital capabilities of students and staff brings individual and organisational benefits such as:

- providing education in flexible and innovative ways
- meeting the expectations and needs of a diversity of students through an enhanced learning experience
- improving employability and higher skills in a digital economy
- attracting students in a global education market, and improving access
- improving processes, systems and building organisational capacity
- maximising the value of investments in learning technologies, content and services.

As the body of research, resources and technologies relating to digital literacy continues to develop, providers are given new perspectives on how to deliver an education which enables all students to develop digital skills, and new evidence to support and guide them in refining what they do.

This review theme therefore seeks to capture a picture of digital literacy as an established but evolving area. It is intended to consolidate, where relevant, the work the higher education providers are undertaking to enhance the digital literacy skills of their students and graduates, to embed the development of such skills in the curriculum, and to promote technology enhanced learning. It will reach beyond the territory covered in the 'quality of student learning opportunities' element of the review process, to give higher education providers an opportunity to present a fuller and more detailed picture of higher education which enables all students to develop digital skills, identify innovative practice, and showcase examples of good practice.

² JISC Developing digital literacy, available at: www.jiscinfonet.ac.uk/infokits/digital-literacies/.

Review teams will focus on three broad aspects of digital literacy during the review. These have been identified as areas of particular interest for higher education providers.

- How providers manage and show leadership in their approach to digital literacy and enabling students to develop digital literacy.
- How digital literacy is embedded in the curriculum.
- Staff development to support digital literacy.

This guidance highlights some context for each of these areas, and the sorts of questions that reviewers might ask. It is intended to help providers and student representatives as they prepare their self-evaluation document and student submission, respectively. It will also provide an aide memoire for reviewers during the review process.

It should be noted that where there is overlap between the three topics listed above, providers are encouraged to approach each in the way that best reflects their activities.

How providers manage and show leadership in their approach to digital literacy and enabling students to develop digital skills

Providers may have specified strategic approaches to the development of digital literacy and enabling students to develop digital skills. Reviewers might consider how a vision for digital literacy is communicated to staff, students and other stakeholders, and to what extent senior managers show leadership in promoting digital literacy and acquiring digital skills. Reviewers might also consider how providers commit resources to support the development of digital skills.

Possible review questions

- How do you communicate your vision and position on enabling students to develop digital literacy?
- Can you cite any examples at provider level of how you have identified and removed barriers to enabling students to develop digital literacy?
- What steps have you taken to resource digital literacy?

How digital literacy is embedded in the curriculum

The curriculum provides a framework for engaging with technologies that are educationally relevant. For students, digital practices in the learning environment are shaped within their programme of study where they look to teaching staff for guidance on recommended technologies or adopt those required by the curriculum. Embedding digital capability into the curriculum aligns with their educational aspirations and helps make sense of the tasks and technologies in use. However, there is sometimes a lack of consistency within institutions in how students are introduced to technology in their studies, how technology is used in curriculum activities, and how digital skills are assessed, if at all. Engaging staff and students in development activities and systematically designing digital literacy into the curriculum addresses some of these issues.

Higher education providers employ a variety of mechanisms to support and enable students to develop digital literacy. Reviewers might evaluate the degree to which a learning and teaching strategy, learning resources strategy or similar values, supports and impacts on the embedding of digital literacy in the curriculum. In considering the curriculum, reviewers might assess the extent to which:

- learning outcomes reflect digital literacy skills
- teaching includes a variety of technology specific to the subject discipline
- technology enhances academic development, and helps students become effective learners
- assessment and feedback promotes the use of technology.

Context is key so focusing on the subject specialism is an effective way to engage teaching staff, support staff and students in conversations about what it means to be digitally literate in a particular discipline. Aligned with that is the curriculum design process. Learning design workshops and curriculum approval processes can ensure that digital literacy is developed through appropriate tasks and articulated in learning outcomes.

Reviewers might use the theme to explore whether programme design, review and evaluation arrangements include consideration of the development of digital literacy, how effectively it is delivered and resourced, and whether it could be enhanced. Reviewers could also explore the quality of induction and ongoing support for students in using technology as part of their academic development.

Possible review questions

- Can you cite any examples at provider level of how you have identified and responded to opportunities to embed digital literacy in the curriculum?
- How are students engaged in ongoing discussions and decision making about ICT, and the use of technology in their programmes of study?
- How do employers inform the use of technology in programmes?
- How do you ensure that your provision promotes students' digital literacy?
- How do you promote the use of technology in learning and teaching?
- How do you use technology in assessment and feedback?
- How do you embed authentic technology-enhanced assessment tasks in discipline areas?
- How does assessment feedback support the development of students' digital literacy?
- How do you showcase technology-enabled academic and professional practice through your teaching?

Staff development to support inclusive provision

A provider's ability to promote and enhance students' digital literacy through learning and teaching and a digitally rich environment depends on the digital capabilities and confidence of staff. The use of technology is a desired skill in higher education staff, as recognised in the Higher Education Academy's Professional Standards Framework.^{3 4}

In considering staff development, reviewers might consider where responsibility and leadership lies for the enhancement of digital literacy both in the curriculum and in staff development. Reviewers might consider the range and effectiveness of staff development programmes and training activities.

Reviewers might explore how staff are informed, including through induction, of their responsibility to use technology in their teaching, and how effectively this responsibility is managed through staff appraisal processes, and how technology can support this process

³ UK Professional Standards Framework, available at: www.heacademy.ac.uk/ukpsf.

⁴ JISC and Professional Associations Guide to Implementing the UKPSF in the Digital University, available at: <https://ukpsfguide.pbworks.com/w/page/62948690/Home>.

(for example through the use of an e-portfolio). Reviewers would also be interested in the ways providers share good practice between discipline areas, or the arrangements for staff with specific expertise to facilitate and support other curriculum managers; and the way providers work in partnership with students as change agents or digital pioneers to support staff in the development of their digital literacy.

Possible review questions

- How are staff informed of their responsibilities to promote digital literacy within their curriculum area?
- Can you cite any examples of how you have enabled your teaching staff to ensure students are supported to develop their digital literacy?
- Can you cite examples of opportunities for staff to develop their digital literacy in the curriculum and fully realise all that technology-enhanced learning has to offer?
- What resources and support do you have for staff to enhance their use of technology enhanced learning?
- How are staff supported to develop a professional online presence and engage in open online practice?

References in the Quality Code relevant to digital literacy

Digital literacy may be identified as either a set of subject-specific or generic skills included within the design of programmes or be developed through the use of technology in various aspects of the delivery. The Quality Code is framed on the basis of being applicable to all forms of delivery of provision leading to a higher education qualification enabling providers to apply it to their specific approaches and requirements.

The following references indicate those elements of the Quality Code which either address specific aspects of digital literacy or more general principles which may be considered from the digital literacy perspective.

Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards

- The qualification descriptors for each level in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) include a section on 'qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment'.
- Subject benchmark statements also describe generic skills which students develop.

Chapter B1: Programme Design and Approval

- Indicator 1 recognises that through maintaining strategic oversight of their processes for, and outcomes of, programme design, development and approval, higher education providers can ensure that programmes reflect their strategic priorities which may include developing digital literacy.

Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching

- Indicator 1 identifies the value of articulating and implementing a strategic approach to learning and teaching which addresses the learning opportunities for every student embracing all modes of study, including the use of technology to any extent and the need for parity of opportunities between students. It also identifies academic and digital literacy as one of the themes that cross subject boundaries

and which might therefore be embedded within academic programmes where it reflects the strategic priorities of the provider.

- Indicator 5 addresses the ways in which the provider ensures the continued effectiveness of its strategic approach, which may include drawing on data regarding the uptake and utilisation of any virtual learning environment and assistive technology.
- Indicator 2 focuses on providers ensuring that students have equal and effective opportunities to achieve the intended learning outcomes through their access to learning and teaching activities and associated resources, including any virtual learning environment (with reasonable adjustments made if required).
- Indicator 4 focuses on assuring that staff involved in teaching or supporting learning are equipped to fulfil their roles in relation to their specific contexts; this may involve recognising the importance of digital literacy for staff and making available suitable development opportunities.
- Indicator 6 refers to the provision of learning environments, including virtual, that are safe, accessible, and reliable for every student.
- Indicator 7 focuses on the provision of information to students to enable them to take full advantage of the learning opportunities which may include virtual learning environments and related technology.

Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement

- Indicator 3 focuses on higher education providers' commitment to equity in enabling student development and achievement, in particular developing an inclusive environment where the use of digital opportunities is being provided.
- Indicator 6 refers to ensuring that all students have opportunities to develop their academic and employability skills that enable their academic, personal and professional progression.
- In a similar way to Indicator 4 of *Chapter B3*, Indicator 7 relates to ensuring that staff who enable students to develop and achieve are equipped to fulfil their role.
- Indicator 8 focuses on the provision of appropriate learning resources and enabling students to develop the skills to use those resources, including recognising the role of digital literacy in making the best use of virtual learning environments.

Chapter B6: Assessment of Students and Accreditation of Prior Learning

- Indicator 4 mirrors Indicator 4 of *Chapter B3*, and focuses on ensuring that those involved in assessment of student work (including prior learning) are competent to fulfil their roles, which will include the use of technology for undertaking or managing assessment, and includes enabling staff to learn about new approaches to assessment.
- Indicator 5 supports this, focusing on the development of practice by staff including in relation to the use of technology for supporting assessment and for enabling feedback to students.
- Indicator 7 relates to the development of good academic practice by students, which includes understanding how such practice relates to all sources of information including electronic.

Chapter B7: External Examining

- Indicators 2 and 3 focus on the feedback provided by external examiners relating to securing academic standards - including in relation to assessment that may involve various forms of technology - and in contributing to enhancement and innovation in relation to learning, teaching and assessment.

- Indicator 5 sets out the person specification for external examiners including taking account of their competence in relation to the type and form of assessment tasks and procedures which the appointing provider operates.
- Indicator 6 is concerned with the information about the higher education provider which is made available to an external examiner to enable the role to be fulfilled; where appropriate this reflects the way in which technology may be used in assessment as part of the learning, teaching and assessment strategies.
- Indicator 10 focuses on the evidence which is provided to external examiners to enable them to make judgements, taking account for example of how externals are given access to student work which is electronically submitted and/or stored.

Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review

- Indicator 2 focuses on the contribution of monitoring and review processes to the enhancement of learning opportunities, including the extent to which programmes reflect developments in pedagogy, including the use of technology in learning and teaching. Further monitoring and review processes evaluate the extent to which students are attaining the intended learning outcomes, which may include digital literacy where this is embedded in programmes.

Chapter B10: Managing Higher Education Provision with Others

- *Chapter B10* is concerned with cases where a degree-awarding body engages with another organisation to provide learning opportunities and the safeguards and respective responsibilities in such cases. Where this is related to digital literacy, for example when engaging with another provider to deliver teaching or access to learning resources, appropriate reference needs to be made to relevant aspects of *Chapter B10*. In all cases the degree-awarding body needs to ensure effective control and oversight of the arrangement, to the extent that is appropriate and proportionate for the specific arrangement, paying particular attention to Indicators 2-10. Where learning opportunities such as teaching are provided, particular reference should also be given to Indicators 11 and 13-17 as applicable.
- In all cases attention is paid to the provision of information for students and others about the arrangements; Indicator 18 refers.

B11: Research Degrees

- Indicator 4 refers to the provision of the research environment and infrastructure for research students including access to adequate learning and research tools such as IT equipment, library and electronic publications.

Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

- Indicator 3 refers to information provided to students about the academic environment and support that will be made available to them including access to resources and facilities, including virtual learning environments.

Other relevant resources

Developing Digital Literacies:

- www.jiscinfonet.ac.uk/infokits/digital-literacies/
- www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/elearning/developingdigitalliteracies.aspx

JISC Digital Student project: <http://digitalstudent.jiscinvolve.org>.

Changing landscapes: The challenges of IT and digital skills training in the changing HE landscape: www.ucisa.ac.uk/publications/changing_land.aspx.

QAA997 - Dec 14

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2014
Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB

Tel: 01452 557 000

Email: enquiries@qaa.ac.uk

Website: www.qaa.ac.uk

Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786