

The Quality Code for Higher Education

Your Questions 2013–15

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Foreword

I'm delighted to be able to introduce *Your Questions 2013-15*, a compilation of questions about or relating to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code), with responses provided by QAA's Quality Code team.

The content of *Your Questions* is based on the enquiries that QAA has received, over the last two years, about the Code and the topics that it covers. The enquiries are diverse and broad ranging, but common themes and topics recur, and we have organised the document in a way that reflects this.

Some questions in this document draw on a selection of similar enquiries relating to a particular issue, others are based on individual enquiries which have been appropriately edited and anonymised. All the questions included contain detail that we think will be helpful to share with all users of the Quality Code.

We hope that *Your Questions* will help you to better understand the Quality Code and how to use it. If you have a question about a topic that isn't covered here, please do use our enquiries service (enquiries@qaa.ac.uk) to tell us more.



Ian Kimber
Director of Quality Development
QAA

Admissions and entry requirements

Relevant components of the Quality Code:

Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education

1 Does QAA investigate situations where entry requirements for undergraduate courses disadvantage and/or discriminate against mature students?

Higher education providers are autonomous and responsible for their own admissions policies and requirements. It is up to individual providers to decide what qualifications they are willing to accept for admission to a particular programme, including what qualifications they recognise as equivalent to, for example, GCSE or A Level.

Chapter B2 of the Quality Code makes clear that the policies and procedures that a higher education provider uses to admit students are expected to be clear, fair, explicit and consistently applied. This includes giving careful consideration to the various different ways in which required or desirable characteristics might be demonstrated.

If you are worried that certain entry requirements are unfair, you should first go back to the provider's admissions department, to clarify exactly what their requirements are and whether any equivalent qualifications are accepted. The provider should be able to explain this and, if necessary, why they think that their arrangements are fair.

If you are still unhappy, you may wish to register a complaint with the provider.

2 The explanatory text under Indicator 2 of *Chapter B2* of the Quality Code refers to 'all stages of recruitment, selection and admission'. What are these stages and why are recruitment and admission processes covered together?

The stages described are: thinking about applying to higher education, applying to higher education, going through the selection process, receiving the decision and feedback, and making the transition from prospective student to current student. The second half of *Chapter B2* is structured around these stages (see the subheadings from Indicator 5 onwards).

We have included recruitment, selection and admission together in this chapter to cover the whole experience from the applicant's point of view, and to avoid a narrow focus strictly on admissions processes. This is explained in the introduction to the Chapter.

3 Is it acceptable for an applicant with an HND (from China) to progress onto a master's at a private institution?

This would be up to the individual degree awarding body responsible for the award. We recommend that you contact their admissions office for more information.

Appeals and complaints

Relevant components of the Quality Code:

Chapter B9: Academic Appeals and Student Complaints

1 I would like to know if, when a student makes an appeal against the award of a qualification on the grounds of extenuating circumstances due to a disability, the University is in breach of the Quality Code if it does not give out all of the information gathered in making its final decision.

I am concerned that there is the potential for unfairness if the University has access to all information in reaching their decision, but the student does not (unless they make a Subject Access Request under the Data Protection Act).

This is not formally set out in the Quality Code, but it is regarded as a fundamental principle of complaints and appeals and other quasi-legal processes that both parties have access to all the documentation and hear all the witnesses. The individual making an appeal is only excluded from the part of the process where the decision makers consider and reach their decision.

The only limits to the information released would relate to not disclosing potentially damaging or sensitive information about a third party. *Chapter B9: Academic Appeals and Student Complaints* reminds providers about the need for equality of access to evidence and, in particular, that each party is able to comment on or respond to relevant evidence.

As a general principle (although, again this is not formally set out), you should not be requiring a student to make a Data Protection Act/Freedom of Information Request to obtain material generated through an appeal or complaint process.

Assessment - examinations

Relevant components of the Quality Code:

Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards, including:
The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies (Qualifications Frameworks)

Chapter B6: Assessment of Students and the Recognition of Prior Learning

1 Does QAA produce guidelines for examination procedures or are they set by each institution? Does QAA have any interest in the proportion of the final degree that is assessed by examination?

QAA provides guidance on assessment in the Quality Code, *Chapter B6: Assessment of Students and the Recognition of Prior Learning*. This document sets out a single Expectation that all providers are required to meet with regard to assessment.

It is up to individual degree-awarding bodies to decide on the detail of their examination procedures, drawing on the guidance provided in the Quality Code. This includes deciding what proportion of assessment is by examination versus other assessment methods (providers will also define what they mean by 'examination'). The form and weighting of assessments must, however, be formally approved, recorded and published for staff and students.

Assessment - marking and moderation

Relevant components of the Quality Code:

Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards, including:
The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies (Qualifications Frameworks)

Chapter B6: Assessment of Students and the Recognition of Prior Learning

1 Do you have a database of higher education institutions that use grade-based assessment/or reduced point marking schemes. Do you know if these institutions also use percentages to mark student work?

QAA does not maintain a database of how degree-awarding bodies grade or mark assessments.

You may find it helpful to refer to QAA's Review Knowledgebases (www.qaa.ac.uk/improving-higher-education/knowledgebase-search) to see if any recommendations or good practice in this area have been highlighted in reviews.

2 I would like to ask the following three questions about assessment:

- a) Is it a requirement for markers to annotate course work or can they only record their feedback on a separate feedback sheet?**
- b) Is it a requirement for both first and second markers to provide written feedback to students? Is it acceptable for the person second marking to give a mark and not provide additional written feedback?**
- c) Where a percentage mark is given, should feedback contain a breakdown which shows how the total mark is made up, or is it acceptable to provide the student with a total percentage without the breakdown?**

It is up to individual providers to decide how assessments should be conducted, as part of their assessment regulations (for further information, see *Chapter A2* of the Quality Code). So, we recommend that you first discuss these questions with your college or university.

Your university or college should provide you (and examiners) with clear information about all of the issues that you raise, but they are free to decide on how to address these.

3 My colleague argues that peer assessment can only be used as a method of formative assessment if a learning outcome calls for it. On the other hand, I am under the impression that peer marking can be used as summative assessment in any circumstances as long as it is robust, valid and reliable (which, to me, means that an appropriate rubric for marking is required).

If I were to use peer marking, I would want each piece of work to be marked anonymously by five anonymous students. All scripts would then be moderated and graded by a lecturer.

QAA does not prescribe how individual assessments should be conducted (whether for formative or summative assessment). It is up to individual degree-awarding bodies to decide how they approach assessment. We therefore recommend that you start by looking at your provider's regulations and procedures. These should reflect the Expectation set out in *Chapter B6* of the Quality Code.

As *Chapter B6* explains, all marking must be robust, valid and reliable. So, as long as safeguards and criteria are put in place, there is no reason why peer marking may not be used in summative assessment. It is our understanding that peer marking which includes moderation by academics would be consistent with established practice.

The extent to which peer marking might be relied upon in the absence of intervention by academics is more open to discussion, and would depend upon what safeguards there are to ensure that it is robust and equitable.

4 I am a university student and would like to know about the moderation of marks. Please could you tell me what moderation means, and whether QAA sets any requirements for moderation which universities need to follow?

I am also interested to know whether there is a prescribed formula for the scaling up or scaling down of marks, and whether moderation should be applied equally to all students, so that the effect of moderation is the same for all?

The current (2015) QAA glossary defines moderation as: 'A process intended to assure that an assessment outcome is fair and reliable and that assessment criteria have been applied consistently'. *Chapter B6* of the Quality Code includes a more detailed description of internal moderation to which you may find it helpful to refer.

Moderation focuses on the marks awarded to the full set of assessed work for a task, module or programme, in the context of the academic standards for the award. It is separate from the question of how differences in marks between two or more markers are resolved, and is not about making changes to an individual student's marks.

QAA does not set national requirements for moderation. All providers have to meet the Expectation of *Chapter B6* of the Quality Code, which requires that providers operate equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment, but it is up to individual degree-awarding bodies to decide how they organise their regulations and processes.

If you want to know more about how your university uses moderation, we recommend that you refer to their academic framework and assessment regulations, which should be available on their website. There may be supplementary regulations at faculty and programme level and staff may be able to provide further information.

As with moderation, there are no national requirements for the scaling up or scaling down of marks. Again, it is up to individual degree-awarding bodies to decide how they do this.

If an adjustment to the standard of marking was felt necessary as a result of moderation, it would normally apply to the full set of assessments submitted or possibly all of those falling within a specific grade or marking band (for instance all first class marks if this was where the concern lay) rather than to individual students.

5 I represent students from my course on the university's board. I have received complaints from students about the fairness of marking of a particular piece of coursework. The marking feedback suggests that the marker may not even have seen the work which they have assessed. For example, there is a comment that something is missing from the report, when in fact it has been explained there in great detail. What further action should I take?

Fairness is a fundamental part of the assessment of student work. *Chapter B6* of the Quality Code requires that providers operate equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment. (See the Chapter itself for further information).

If you feel that part of the university's assessment procedure has not been fair or that some aspect of the assessment process has gone wrong, the best thing to do is approach the chair of the examination board, the relevant head of department, academic sub-dean or other appropriate officer. They will be able to investigate and rectify any errors, if these have been made. Your university's assessment regulations or student handbook should tell you who to contact about any concerns you may have about assessment matters.

If you remain dissatisfied as a result of this first enquiry then you may wish to refer to *Chapter B9: Student Complaints and Academic Appeals* of the Quality Code. Your university will also have a formal complaints procedure.

6 I attend an institute that is a part of a university and offers vocational training. The institute's marking scheme differs from every other provider of vocational legal similar training, in that it sets a higher standard for the achievement of commendation and distinction. You need over 70 per cent for a commendation and over 80 per cent for a distinction.

This means that, when competing for the same jobs, graduates of our competitor with an average mark of 70 get a distinction, while those of my institute, with an average of 69.9, only get a pass.

Does the Quality Code say anything about whether this is acceptable?

The first thing to confirm is the type of qualification to which you refer. You mention that it is 'vocational training'. It may be that the award is not a higher education qualification awarded by the university, but one awarded by a professional or regulatory body, or an awarding body regulated by Ofqual. If that is the case, the threshold standards and marking criteria will be those set by that awarding body, and do not fall within the remit of the Quality Code.

If it is a higher education qualification, awarded by the degree-awarding body, then it is important to remember that there is a distinction between 'threshold academic standards', which are the minimum acceptable level of achievement that a student has to demonstrate to be eligible for an academic award, and 'academic standards' which are the standards that individual degree-awarding bodies set and maintain for the award of their qualifications, and which may exceed the threshold standards.

Part A of the Quality Code includes the national *Qualifications Frameworks* which set out the threshold standards for higher education qualifications at various levels (undergraduate, master's and doctoral levels, for example). Individual degree-awarding bodies are required by Part A to ensure that UK threshold academic standards are met in their awards.

Above the threshold or minimum, individual degree-awarding bodies are responsible for defining their own academic standards. This includes setting pass marks and determining any criteria for classification of qualifications that differentiate between levels of student achievement above (and below) the threshold. There is, therefore, nothing to prevent them from setting higher standards for certain classifications than other providers. However, measures of performance and classification should be explicit, transparent and accessible to those who need to know about them.

For further information see Part A and *Chapter B6* of the Quality Code. The relevant professional body would also be a useful source of information.

It may be worth bearing in mind that there is no absolute value to any numerical marks or alpha-numeric grades used. The value of the mark or grade assigned is defined by the assessment criteria and marking schemes associated with them. So if the assessment criteria for a pass are linked to a 40 per cent mark at one university and to a 50 per cent mark at another university, it does not necessarily imply that one marking scheme is more demanding than the other one. It simply means that they are using different marking schemes to define an equivalent standard (a pass). To understand the differences in academic standards between universities it is necessary to look at the relative demand of the programme outcomes and the assessment criteria used in the marking schemes to test these.

Assessment - plagiarism

Relevant components of the Quality Code:

Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards, including:
The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies (Qualifications Frameworks)

Chapter B6: Assessment of Students and the Recognition of Prior Learning

1 A colleague tells me that his published book has been plagiarised by a student from another university. He has complained to that university. However, it has responded that it cannot address his complaint as it has no regulatory framework on academic plagiarism.

My colleague has asked a number of other universities if they have such procedures which, he claims, they do not. However, at both the universities I attended there definitely were procedures for dealing with plagiarism.

I note that ***Chapter B6*** of the Quality Code covers plagiarism but I would appreciate your further advice.

Your colleague may have been asking for the wrong information. Universities will almost certainly have policies governing student-academic misconduct or plagiarism, which apply both to undergraduate and postgraduate students.

Where the confusion possibly lies is that the plagiarism policy may only apply if the student has plagiarised in an assignment submitted for assessment. If the student has, for example, written and had published an academic paper or a book that plagiarises material, the person whose work had been plagiarised would need to contact the journal or publisher involved.

2 The editor of a book that I published 18 months ago recently found evidence that extracts from my book have been plagiarised by a student who graduated last year.

I contacted the student's university to raise a complaint under its academic misconduct policy. The university acknowledged that there was a case of plagiarism to be made and allowed me to look at the student's work and identify it. It set up a panel to review the evidence and make recommendations to the board of examiners.

During the initial stages, the university was engaging with me and included me in the investigation. In the past few weeks, however, the university has advised me that it will not release any information that is being reported to the board of examiners or invite me to the panel meeting. I feel that I am being disempowered from the process, despite the fact that I am alleging plagiarism of my work.

I have referred to ***Chapter B6*** of the Quality Code which suggests that all parties should be kept up to date and informed. I have also referred to the University's policy but the university says that it is an extraordinary and irregular case of plagiarism.

Is the university in breach of ***Chapter B6*** of the Quality Code by excluding me in this way? Does it owe the same duty of care to me as it does to the student who has plagiarised my work?

As a starting point, we recommend that you obtain a copy of the degree-awarding body's procedures to determine what, if any, rights or opportunities this gives a person in your position. It may be that the degree-awarding body's procedures do not give you any specific rights, but make clear the responsibility of the decision-making body (investigation panel, board of examiners or equivalent) to determine what evidence is needed and how it will be obtained.

The degree-awarding body's procedures are likely to say more about the rights of the student at the centre of the allegations, especially in terms of being able to challenge the evidence. The process in this case may, of course, turn on whether the student has accepted the allegations or not and/or what other evidence is available.

Chapter B6 of the Quality Code does not place an obligation on the provider in terms of a duty of care to you. It is up to the university concerned to decide what it does with the evidence of alleged plagiarism, in accordance with its procedures. But the university must follow its procedures, not least to ensure that any final decision regarding the alleged plagiarism is valid.

It would be reasonable for the degree-awarding body to at least inform you of the final outcome of the case, and its procedures may well make this clear.

Assessment - policy and practices

Relevant components of the Quality Code:

Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards, including:
The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies (Qualifications Frameworks)

Chapter B6: Assessment of Students and the Recognition of Prior Learning

1 I am a higher education manager from a college and we are currently updating our higher education assessment policy. I have looked at Part A of the Quality Code, and Chapter B6, and I wonder if there is any other guidance to consider for level 4-6 courses? As our courses are validated by two local universities, I have also looked at Chapter B10.

We recommend that you look at the assessment policies of the two validating universities which will govern the way that your college assesses the programmes it delivers on behalf of these bodies. The two degree-awarding bodies are responsible for the assessment of the programmes which lead to their awards and will need to be consulted about any changes you wish to make.

2 How many times is a student permitted to retake an assessment in the context of a course that is accredited by a public, statutory or regulatory body (PSRB)?

Individual degree-awarding bodies are responsible for setting and maintaining the standards of their awards, and this includes deciding how many opportunities a student has to submit an assessment.

In determining their regulations, degree-awarding bodies take account of the requirements of individual PSRBs that accredit their programmes, and they may set programme-specific requirements or regulations to take account of these.

Where PSRB requirements appear incompatible with a degree-awarding body's regulations (for example, where a student is allowed more attempts to successfully complete an assessment by the PSRB than are permitted by a university) it may be helpful to look at whether PSRB requirements place the onus on the university to provide the necessary number of attempts, or on the student to pass within that number.

For further information, see Part A of the *Quality Code*, and *Chapter B6: Assessment of Students and the Recognition of Prior Learning* of the Quality Code, which refer to making assessment and progression requirements explicit, transparent and accessible.

3 I have a concern about some procedures at my college and I was advised by the Citizen's Advice Bureau to contact the QAA.

I believe it is normal practice for me to pay the college to take part in classes and to enter the exam. I would like to know if, on top of the fee that the students pay for the course and on top of exam fees, the college is entitled to charge the students for resitting an examination they have failed?

QAA cannot advise on whether or not the college is entitled to do this. As universities are autonomous and independent, they set their own fee structures. It is fairly standard practice for a fee to be charged for resitting assessments.

However, Part C of the Quality Code does require the provider to make clear all fees and charges that a student might face.

4 Our exam rules stipulate that mobile phones are not allowed in the exam room. If a candidate arrives with one, they are required to switch it off and leave it in their coat, bag or with the invigilator at the front of the exam room. The awarding body will impose sanctions if, once it has investigated, it feels that there is clear evidence of malpractice.

I would like to try and gauge what other degree-awarding bodies do to prevent such incidents, or if they know of ways to prevent them. I would also be interested to hear about the approaches of other awarding bodies to the level and severity of sanctions applied, and about whether any awarding bodies are using metal detectors.

QAA is not able to provide this sort of information.

You may find it helpful to speak to the Academic Registrar at your provider who may be able to access such information via their networks.

More general information about exam regulations is available through published QAA review reports.

5 Does QAA specify the number of words that should be required for summative assessments in diplomas and/or bachelor's degrees?

Do requirements differ between qualifications achieved entirely through course work and those which include examinations?

QAA does not specify word counts for assessments. It is up to individual degree-awarding bodies to decide on these.

The word length required for a piece of assessment will vary depending on the type of exercise (for example, a dissertation is longer than an extended essay), the level of the qualification, the credit rating and also on the conventions of the subject studied.

For further information, see *Chapter B6* of the Quality Code.

6 What standards are in place for the assessment of group work? Should students be assessed individually? Is there any QAA guidance for group work and particularly the assessment of it?

QAA does not produce guidance on the conduct of individual forms of assessment. It is up to individual degree-awarding bodies to decide on how to conduct assessment and what methods to use.

However, you may find it helpful to refer to *Chapter B6* of the Quality Code. All providers are required to meet the Expectation set out in this chapter, which involves the use of assessment methods that are equitable, valid and reliable. The Chapter includes extensive discussion of how providers can ensure that they are meeting this Expectation.

Depending on the subject area, our Subject Benchmark Statements (www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/subject-benchmark-statements) may also be of assistance. These provide information about the forms of assessment that tend to be used in different subject areas

7 Does QAA provide any guidance on the use of translation dictionaries in exams for students who do not have English as a first language?

QAA does not provide detailed guidance on the conduct of assessments. It is up to individual degree-awarding bodies to set their own regulations, in the light of the Expectations in *Chapter A3* and *Chapter B6*. UK degree-awarding bodies should also bear in mind the need to assure appropriate standards of language competence for a qualification in English.

Given that it is necessary (as discussed in *Chapter B6*) to ensure fairness and parity of treatment in assessment, we think it would be unusual for students who do not have English as a first language to be permitted to use dictionaries in an exam, unless all candidates were allowed to do so.

8 I have recently finished studying for a degree at a college which is partnered with a university. I am currently awaiting my degree classification but I know that I am on a borderline between a Lower Second and Third Class degree.

The University states in their conventions that the collaborative partner (the college) is required to adopt two principles in borderline cases, Exit Velocity and Preponderance. Does the QAA Quality Code allow a collaborative partner to adopt both principles?

Where a provider (such as a college) delivers a programme on behalf of a degree-awarding body (such as a university), the qualification must be awarded in accordance with the assessment requirements and regulations of that degree-awarding body, or in accordance with regulations which the degree-awarding body has approved for specific programmes delivered by the provider. *Chapter B10* of the Quality Code explores this issue in more detail.

So, in the circumstances that you describe, the College should adopt both principles and is allowed to do so. In general, it is not unusual for assessment regulations to embrace a number of principles or criteria for determining classifications and the treatment of borderline candidates.

9 We operate a single tier examination board but are considering whether we might have two tiers in future. We are currently debating how best to ensure, in a two tier system, that programme-level examiners can be confident that module-level marks are robust. We think it is likely to be through a combination of meeting documentation and external examiner reports, with the external examiner(s) agreeing the mechanisms for this, as would happen for samples of assessed work at module level. Are you able to offer any advice?

Two tier examination boards are quite common across the sector. They tend to involve module/unit level examination boards which assure and confirm marks for individual modules as the first stage, and programme (or even departmental/school or faculty level) examination boards which deal with progression and award of qualifications as the second stage. Two separate types of external examiners are associated with the tiers; those for modules and those for programmes/award of qualifications. Sometimes an external examiner can be assigned both roles, acting firstly as a module external examiner and also subsequently as a programme external examiner.

The two-tier system essentially formalises what are two separate stages in the assessment process, namely assuring the standards of, and confirming marks for, individual modules and then determining progression and award of qualifications. The roles of the external examiners at each of the two stages are different. The module/unit level external examiners have the responsibility for assuring the robustness and validity of the marks. The programme/award level external examiners' responsibility primarily tends to be overseeing the progression and award decisions in line with institutional regulations and ensuring consistency of approach between different programmes in programme clusters or departments.

Programme level external examiners would normally have access to module examination board minutes (and, in due course, module external examiner reports) but it is generally not their role to be concerned about the robustness of marks at that stage. External examiners are used to working with other external examiners (for instance on combined honours programmes) and in relying on other examination boards and their external examiners for the assurance of marks when marks are imported from other subject areas (such as major/minor combinations).

We recommend that you have a conversation with your externals on any proposals, to assure yourself that the arrangements are appropriate. You might, in advance of finalising proposals, find it helpful to talk to other institutions that adopt a two-tier system about their experiences of the process.

10 I am interested in how QAA defines and evaluates progression from year 1 to year 3 on a BA course at a UK university, and whether there are any special guidelines for humanities subjects. I have looked at the Quality Code, but I have not found anything pertinent apart from some references in *Chapter B4*, and a brief survey of good practice in English. Can you direct me to some more specific information?

QAA does not provide guidance on progression requirements for programmes of study. Individual degree-awarding bodies (such as universities) are independently responsible for defining progression arrangements on their programmes.

For further information we recommend that you start by looking at your own university's academic frameworks and assessment regulations.

More detailed explanation of degree-awarding bodies' responsibilities can be found in Part A of the Quality Code.

You may also find it useful to consult the Subject Benchmark Statement for English (www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/subject-benchmark-statements/honours-degree-subjects).

11 I have been looking at *Chapter B6* of the Quality Code with reference to recognition of prior learning and whether there is a need for a change in terminology in my particular area.

I run a range of top-up degrees for which the pre-entry criterion is accredited prior learning at level 5 and above. I believe this remains the same but I am seeking clarification please.

It is important to note that it is up to individual universities to determine their own terminology. They may wish to ensure consistency across all departments, and to ensure that terminology is consistent with any university policy.

When the latest version of *Chapter B6* of the Quality Code was being produced, the Advisory Group considered that the term 'recognition' better reflected current practice, in particular by allowing harmonisation across the UK. Scotland has used the term recognition of prior learning for a long time, and it is consistent with a number of European countries.

However, it is not the intention of this chapter to compel providers to change existing terminology where this works for them, especially as this could have subsequent effects in terms of workload and the resources required for changing policies.

The priority should be to ensure that current and prospective students know what the concept is (rather than the formal label) and what the opportunities for recognition and accreditation are.

Changing or closing a programme

Relevant components of the Quality Code:

Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review

1 If a provider decides to close a programme, should enrolled students be allowed to finish the course first, and what is the general procedure for this?

Providers are expected to have in place procedures for approving the withdrawal of programmes. These must include consideration of how the interests of students will be protected, including students already on the programme and those to whom offers of places have been made.

Typically this would involve running out the programme (allowing enrolled and accepted students to finish the programme first), or agreeing alternative arrangements with the students concerned (such as transferring to a similar programme or perhaps transferring to another provider). The students and the provider are in a contractual relationship and commitments have to be met.

If you are concerned, we recommend that you start by consulting the specific provider concerned about its procedures, and it is always a good idea for students in this position to get advice from their Students' Union.

For further information, see *Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review* of the Quality Code.

2 I would like some advice on changes to university regulations. I am a postgraduate student studying at an institution that has recently merged with another university and the staff and I are unclear as to which regulations should be followed post-merger.

I have opted to stay with the original validating body and we believe that the regulations for PhD examination that were in place at the commencement of my studies are applicable. These are the regulations I agreed to when I accepted a place at the university.

Could you provide clarification that this is in line with expectations and that new regulations cannot be imposed without the students' permission?

This issue is discussed in *Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review* of the Quality Code.

The answer to your question will depend on the specific arrangements made for the merger between the organisations involved. We recommend that you consult the original validating body (if this still exists) for the research programme to which you were admitted, or the Academic Registrar of the university of which your institution is now a part.

Typically, students on course in a situation like this would complete their studies under the authority of the degree-awarding body in force when they were admitted, and hence under that body's regulations (although completion of the programme might be time-limited). In some cases students might be given the choice of transferring to the new validating authority and the studies would then proceed under the regulations of the new degree-awarding body.

It is not unusual for degree-awarding bodies to work with different sets of regulations for different cohorts of students but it has to be made absolutely clear to both staff and students involved which regulations apply to which groups of students.

Compensation and condonement

Relevant components of the Quality Code:

Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards, including:
The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies (Qualifications Frameworks)

1 Do the Expectations in the Quality Code, Part A: Chapter 3 outlaw the practice of compensating and condoning marks? How are review teams meant to interpret these Expectations with respect to condoning marks when on reviews?

The practices of compensation and condonement are not outlawed by Part A.

Part A, including the *Qualifications Frameworks*, require that degree-awarding bodies award qualifications only where the achievement of relevant learning outcomes (module learning outcomes in the case of credit and programme outcomes in the case of qualifications) has been demonstrated through assessment.

This does not mean that compensation or condonement cannot be applied. However, they have to be practised in a way that does not allow a qualification to be awarded unless the programme outcomes have been met, and that does not allow specific credit to be awarded for a module unless the relevant module outcomes are met.

It is up to the degree-awarding body to demonstrate how it ensures that a qualification is awarded only when the programme outcomes have been met. In terms of the award of credit for individual modules, credit should be awarded only if the module outcomes have been achieved as demonstrated by passing the module. Credit should not be assigned for a module that a student has failed.

In this context, compensation or condonement may be applied to allow failure in one or more modules to be accommodated, so that a student can progress, or be awarded a qualification. This is normally achieved by the use of the concepts of specific and general credit. Specific credit is awarded for individual modules where assessment has demonstrated achievement of the module outcomes. General credit (credit which is not attached to specific modules) may be awarded in circumstances where a degree-awarding body requires a full complement of credits to be obtained - so to enable the student to progress from one level to the next in a situation where one or more modules have been failed, but within the limits of tolerance set by the degree-awarding body's assessment regulations. Similarly, a qualification may be awarded where one or more modules have been failed, provided that the programme outcomes have been secured through other modules, and general credit may be awarded for the failed modules.

Some degree-awarding bodies do not employ general credit but establish assessment regulations which are flexible in the number of credits required for progressing from one level to the next and in the number required for the award of a qualification. They therefore tolerate failures in some modules. In this situation it is important that the transcript or record of achievement makes clear which modules have been passed and have specific credits awarded and which have been failed and for which specific credit cannot therefore be assigned. Any general credit, if assigned, should be shown or identified separately.

Reviewers can check what mechanisms the degree-awarding body employs to ensure that programme learning outcomes have been achieved and that a qualification can be awarded, in circumstances where compensation and/or condonement have been applied.

These may include for example:

- designation of core modules, which cannot be compensated or condoned, and optional or non-core modules, which can be
- mapping of programme learning outcomes against modules
- rules about pre-requisite and co-requisite modules
- checklist of circumstances in which compensation/condonement may or may not be applied, usually through evidence of similar achievement at a similar level elsewhere in the programme.

2 Can a condoned module count towards a master's? If it can, would the master's degree be recognised in other countries?

Yes, it can, if permitted by the academic regulations of the degree-awarding body. Typically a condoned module is one that has been narrowly failed and therefore the specific module credits are not awarded but the candidate is still awarded the qualification based on having met the programme learning outcomes as a whole, through other modules.

The transcript/HEAR will therefore confirm that the qualification has been awarded but will also show a module as having been failed but condoned.

Whether the award is then recognised outside the UK is a matter for individual universities. If it is challenged, the UK awarding university may be able to help explain the validity of the award.

Credit

Relevant components of the Quality Code:

Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards, including:

The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies (Qualifications Frameworks)

Higher Education Credit Framework for England: Guidance on Academic Credit Arrangements in Higher Education in England

1 Why can one UK medical school award UK credits for a Bachelor's Degree in Medical Science on completion of pre-clinical years and another UK medical school not?

Although most universities in England use credit, they are not required to do so. Credits are not used in all disciplines and most medical schools in the UK do not use credit.

Most universities which offer primary medical qualifications have an exit qualification for students who leave the medical degree programme after three years or more without completing the full programme but who satisfy specified academic requirements for that exit qualification (typically a bachelor's degree).

The University that awards the degree will be able to supply a certificate and an academic transcript. Even without ECTS credits, a UK degree can be recognised in other European countries as a basis for further study, depending on the discipline.

2 What quality assurance arrangements should be in place for i) non-credit rated courses and ii) certificates of attendance?

If a course leads to the award of credit or to the award of a qualification it should be subject to the usual quality assurance arrangements of the degree-awarding body. These will involve meeting the Expectations set out in QAA's Quality Code and the arrangements should be publicly available.

If a course does not lead to the award of credit or to a qualification, but a certificate of attendance is issued, then the Quality Code is not expected to apply. You should contact the provider to find out about what quality assurance arrangements are in place.

3 Do degrees have to be completed and awarded within a specific time frame or is it possible to add modules at a later date to count towards the degree? I was one module short of completing a degree in 1998 but undertook a level 6 module in a related subject 5 years later. Could credits from the two be added together to make up a full degree?

Unfortunately credit cannot be accumulated on an ad-hoc basis once a programme has been completed. Generally the opportunity to address any shortfall in credits if you fail to complete a degree is time-limited, to preserve the currency of the learning. For this reason, degree-awarding bodies' academic regulations generally set a maximum period of registration for a programme.

For more detailed advice you need to go back to the degree-awarding body for the degree programme on which you were originally registered. You may be able to apply for recognised prior learning elsewhere on a new programme of study but questions may be raised about the currency of your learning. For further information see the *Introduction to Academic Credit*.

4 We have an EU student on an undergraduate programme who wishes to complete one term/semester (and take level 5 modules) in another EU country. The student applied to a host institution in the EU as a 'free mover' and was accepted to study with them for a semester. At that point the student informed us of their intention and assumed that any credit achieved at the host institution would automatically be recognised by us.

One issue is that the programme which they are studying with us is recognised by a professional body, with whom we have a QA type agreement. Also this programme does not accept credit transferred from anywhere at level 5 (nationally as well as internationally). The student is insisting that we are required by the Lisbon Convention to accept the credit. Does the Lisbon Convention supersede local rules and regulations?

The Lisbon Convention provides a right to have a qualification fairly considered (on grounds of knowledge and skills achieved).

However, as a degree-awarding body you have an academic framework and regulations that govern the awards of credit and qualifications. European agreements do not give the student overriding rights, if the course regulations in this particular case explicitly preclude the transfer of credit from other providers, both nationally and internationally.

The relationship to the professional body is also important. The student needs to be aware that they may be jeopardising their route to professional recognition. It may or may not be the case that what the student is proposing would mean that the final award would not be recognised because it has departed from the accredited programme.

5 Can my institution change the number of credits I have to study at a given level after I have commenced my studies? I am on the fourth year of a four year part-time degree and have discovered that the final year credit total that I have to study has been changed from 100 to 120 credits. This means that I have to take an extra level 6 module.

Different providers organise part-time degrees in different ways so you need to know how it has been structured so far in order to understand where this 'extra' module has come from. Three hundred and sixty credits are the typical minimum number required in the design of a bachelor's degree with honours. We recommend that you check with your university how many credits have been undertaken in the first three years and whether you will have completed 360 credits by the end of the degree.

You may also wish to refer to Part A of the Quality Code which incorporates the credit frameworks for higher education qualifications in the UK.

6 We are a private provider and have designed a professionally accredited programme using ECTS. Do we have to get approval from a state authority for this programme and the use of ECTS?

QAA is not responsible for ECTS. We recommend that you contact the UK Higher Education International Unit for further information.

In order for UK higher education credit to be awarded, you would have to enter into an arrangement with a degree-awarding body for the programme to be validated or credit-rated, (because UK higher education credit can only be awarded by UK degree-awarding bodies). For further information, see Part A of the Quality Code, which incorporates *Higher Education*

Credit Framework for England: Guidance on Academic Credit Arrangements in Higher Education in England.

7 What is the minimum number of honours credits that must be achieved when calculating an honours degree classification in Scotland?

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), and the FQHEIS, which is embedded in it, specify minimum volumes of credit for different types of qualification in Scotland. To find this information, please refer to the *Qualifications Frameworks*.

The SCQF and the FQHEIS do not require specific numbers of credits for particular degree classifications. Individual degree awarding bodies are free to decide whether and how to use degree classification.

8 I have been asked to develop an MA proposal that would take place across two years with a significant professional practice element in the second year.

I understand from the credit framework that a UK credit unit is based on 10 hours teaching and learning, and that the MA can exceed normal 'credit volume' where professional practice is credited. I also understand that 120 UK credits provide 'learning outcomes and associated workload of a full-time academic year of formal learning'.

On this basis I have calculated that I can allocate 120 credits for formal learning (1,200 hours spread over 30 weeks) and 60 credits for a dissertation (600 hours over 15 weeks). Can you advise me whether this is correct?

All higher education providers in England that use credit are required to align provision with the *Higher Education Credit Framework for England: Guidance on Academic Credit Arrangements in Higher Education in England*. This framework refers to 'notional hours, which are defined as the number of hours which it is expected that a learner will spend, on average, to achieve the specified learning outcomes at a particular level. The number of credits, at a particular level, assigned to a body of learning is based on the estimated notional learning hours (where one credit represents 10 notional hours of learning).

The design components you have outlined appear to be based on sound assumptions and are consistent with the *Higher Education Credit Framework for England: Guidance on Academic Credit Arrangements in Higher Education in England*. If your degree-awarding body is in Wales or Scotland you will need to check the CQFW or the SCQF respectively for guidance on credit in those jurisdictions (see *Chapter A1: UK and European Reference Points*).

The course design and credit requirements must also align with the academic framework requirements of the body awarding the degree so we recommend that you also check your proposals with your degree awarding body.

9 Is there an accepted word count for assessment purposes linked to credits and level of study; for example 1,500 words or equivalent per 10 credits at level 7?

There is no national guidance in this area. The guidance which QAA publishes on credit relates to a general framework level.

We recommend that you refer to your own provider's regulations and guidance as different degree-awarding bodies will have different approaches.

10 Are you able to advise whether a 'professional practice' course can be deemed to be worth 240 credits (or more) across 2 years, and so exceed normal 'credit volume' where professional practice is credited? Is there any guidance on awarding credits for professional practice experience, such as level and number of hours required for each credit?

The credit volumes published in the *Higher Education Credit Framework for England: Guidance on Academic Credit Arrangements in Higher Education in England* are all typical minima and so can be exceeded.

We cannot advise on credit rating of individual modules or programmes. We recommend that you refer to your own institution's regulations and guidance in this area as different degree-awarding bodies will have different approaches.

11 Can students who graduate with a bachelor's degree, having obtained 340 credits, be awarded a third class honours degree? Are students who obtained 320 credits, awarded an ordinary pass degree?

The classification of a degree is determined by how well a student performs in assessment not by the number of credits they have acquired. So, two graduates who have the same number of credits (at least as many as are required for the award to be made) may be awarded a first class and a third class honours respectively, because one achieved much higher marks/grades than the other in assessment.

Different degree-awarding bodies have different rules and regulations about precisely what students have to achieve to be eligible for an honours, ordinary or pass degree. The degree-awarding body is expected to follow the rules it has set for itself and to be clear about where and how it can use discretion in special cases. We recommend that you refer to the university's regulations concerned for further information.

12 I am developing a new integrated master's programme. I wish to offer a postgraduate diploma (PG Dip) as a step off point from this programme and would like to clarify the credit requirements.

The integrated master's structure includes 60 credits at level 6 and 60 credits at level 7 in the third year, progressing to a further 120 credits at level 7 in the fourth (and final) year. The PG Dip step-off point, I assume, should be awarded in year four after 120 credits of level 7 work has been achieved (60 credits at level 7 in year 3, and 60 credits at level 7 in year 4). It appears from QAA guidelines, that 120 credits at level 7 are required for a PG Dip award.

Degree-awarding bodies are responsible for determining their own credit structures, and ensuring that these structures comply with their own academic framework and regulations (see *Chapter A2: Degree-Awarding Bodies Reference Points for Academic Standards*) so we recommend that you discuss this question with your quality office or registry.

All credit structures should be consistent with the *Higher Education Credit Framework for England*, *The Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales* or *The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework* depending on the jurisdiction of the degree-awarding body (see *Chapter A1*). You are right that in England and Northern Ireland a postgraduate diploma requires a minimum of 120 credits of which at least 90 are at level 7.

We understand that it is relatively unusual to have a PG Dip as a stepping-off point in an integrated master's programme (as opposed to a bachelor's degree with honours), but it is probably not impossible, subject to the degree-awarding bodies' regulations.

You might therefore want to consider whether: a student could be awarded a bachelor's as an alternative to the PG Dip (assuming the requirements had been achieved); and/or whether there would also be a stopping off point at bachelor's level separate from the PG Dip.

It's worth noting also that Part A of the Quality Code requires qualifications to be awarded for 'positively defined learning outcomes' (Expectation A1(a)). It is therefore important to make clear what the student has achieved in being awarded the PG Dip (in this case), and that it is not simply offered as 'compensation' for not achieving the master's.

13 I believe that there may be a form of credit called 'Institutional Credit Transaction' in UK universities. If this is the case, are universities permitted to give this to some student and not others?

There is no universal mechanism called 'Institutional Credit Transaction' but it would be perfectly acceptable for an individual degree awarding body to develop something by this name within its own regulations. We recommend that you pursue this enquiry with the university in question.

To start, you might find it helpful to seek clarification of the applicable regulations. You can then complain or appeal as appropriate if you feel that these regulations have been applied inappropriately.

If you do wish to complain or appeal, you may wish to seek the support of student services or the student union which may be able to assist in providing advice, particularly if they have dealt with similar cases.

Degree certificates

Relevant components of the Quality Code:

Chapter B10: Managing Higher Education Provision with Others

1 We are preparing to validate provision developed and delivered by a partner institution. During negotiation a question has been raised regarding the certificate that a successful candidate would receive at the end of their studies.

We, as the degree-awarding body, would issue the certificate, however, the partner would like it to include details of where the student has studied, with the partner's logo/hologram and signature of their head of institution. Is there any guidance on whether this is acceptable?

QAA's guidance on this can be found in *Chapter B10* of the Quality Code. The certificate needs to be clear about the status of the bodies involved, in terms of which body is awarding the degree. The situation which you are describing is that of a classic validation model. In these circumstances, the degree-awarding body would typically state the name and location of the validated partner on the certificate and/or the transcript.

It would be most unusual for the logo and signature of the validated organisation to appear on the certificate (and we are unaware of a precedent). Certificates bear the logo of the awarding authority (both or all in the case of joint awards) and the signature of the officer authorised to confirm or 'certify' an academic award. This is what a 'certificate' is: a certified statement by the body empowered to make an award. It therefore follows that it cannot include the logo or signatures of organisations which have not made the award (but only delivered it on the awarding body's behalf). However, the delivery organisation can issue the transcript if so delegated by your institution and its logo or insignia would appear on that.

It could be seriously misleading (and irregular) if the insignia and signatories of the delivery organisation were to appear on the degree-awarding body certificate so you will need to advise your partner of this.

2 We are the validating body of courses delivered by a collaborative partner and we would like to know whether their institution should be named on the certificate of the award, awarded by us. My understanding is that it should be clear on the award certificate where the course delivery has taken place. However, the Quality Code *Chapter B10* refers to the certificate and/or the record of achievement.

Chapter B10 of the Quality Code makes provision for the name and location of the organisation delivering the programme to be recorded on the certificate and/or the transcript because in some jurisdictions (such as Singapore & UAE) it is not legitimate for the name and location of the delivery organisation to be included on the certificate.

Typically, degree-awarding bodies make reference to the delivery organisation on both the certificate and transcript and it is in the interests of clarity and transparency, and of providing information for a full understanding of the qualification taken, to do so. This would be the preferred solution unless there is a legal impediment to details of the delivery organisation being included on the certificate.

3 We provide a PGCE programme through School Direct arrangements and have a query regarding Part C of the Quality Code, Indicator 6. I understand that our arrangement would be treated as a collaborative-type arrangement. Would there therefore be an expectation that all the schools where a trainee had undertaken their study would be recorded on the record of academic achievement, bearing in mind this could be more than one school?

You may find it helpful to refer to *Chapter B10* of the Quality Code. This Chapter includes a footnote which explains that the stipulation that the certificate and/or record of achievement records the name and location of any other higher education provider involved in the delivery of the programme of study applies to higher education providers which have delivered the entire programme or to multiple partners involved in a joint, dual/double or multiple award. As such it precludes the necessity of listing work placements.

However, *Chapter B10* is also clear that the certificate or record of achievement should not omit anything needed for a full understanding of a student's achievement. Therefore, there is probably no need for all the schools to be included on the record of study (but no harm if they are) but it might be appropriate for the record to state that the programme was delivered via a School Direct Initial Teacher Training (ITT) scheme. This makes it clear how it was delivered without providing details. The same single statement could be used on all relevant records/transcripts.

Degree classification

Relevant components of the Quality Code:

Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards, including:
The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies (Qualifications Frameworks)

1 Where institutions offer integrated master's awards, such as the MPharm, which are unclassified, are institutions expected to provide any particular information about the broad equivalence of the master's award in terms of honours classification?

Integrated master's degrees are master's degrees and are assigned to the next level up the framework from bachelor's degrees with honours (level 7 of the FHEQ or SCQF level 11 of the FQHEIS). As they are at a higher level, they cannot be compared with bachelor's degrees with honours (which are at level 6 of the FHEQ or SCQF level 10 of the FQHEIS). It is therefore not possible to show equivalence in terms of honours classification.

In terms of classification more generally, it is up to degree-awarding bodies to decide whether or not to classify their integrated master's degrees. The majority of master's are not classified but some are and some awarding bodies, alternatively, award distinctions and merit classes.

Individual degree-awarding bodies provide transcripts or records of achievement that give more detailed information about an individual student's marks profile. Degree-awarding bodies can also provide, on request, further information about the basis for any classification system used.

2 Are the academic regulations for the award and classification of degrees the same for each university in the UK?

No. Degree-awarding bodies are autonomous and have different rules and regulations about precisely what students have to achieve to be eligible for the award of a degree (provided that they all meet the national threshold standard set out in Part A of the Quality Code for the relevant type of degree). They also all have different rules about the calibration or classifications of awards above the threshold. The degree-awarding body is expected to follow the rules it has set for itself in its regulations and to be clear about where and how it can use discretion.

3 I think I have come across a systematic flaw in the calculation of degree results at my institution. A number of students appear to have been awarded the wrong classification for their degree. Does my institution have an obligation to report this error to QAA? Can QAA provide any guidance on how this problem might be rectified?

You may find it helpful, first of all to consult the relevant parts and chapters of the Quality Code (specifically *Chapters A3 and B6*).

If you believe there is evidence of systemic failure you can refer this to QAA's Concerns Scheme (www.qaa.ac.uk/concerns).

Degree-awarding bodies are not under an obligation to report errors to us. They are, however, under an obligation to exercise their degree-awarding powers properly and we have an obligation to investigate if we are presented with evidence that suggests there may be a systemic failure to do so. Should we find such failure we would engage with the institution to draw up an action plan with an appropriate timescale to put things right.

If you are concerned about protecting your job, you may be able to make use of whistle-blowing procedures in your institution.

4 What are QAA's views on the variations that exist between the policies of different universities in relation to degree classification boundaries, and the criteria that they use to make decisions about borderline final marks? Does QAA provide recommendations for best practice in this area?

QAA does not provide recommendations for best practice in this area.

Part A of the Quality Code includes the national *Qualifications Frameworks* which set out the minimum standards for higher education qualifications at various levels (for example undergraduate, master's and doctoral levels). These minimum standards are known as 'threshold academic standards'.

Individual degree-awarding bodies are required by Part A to ensure that UK threshold academic standards are met in their awards, and they do this by aligning programme learning outcomes with the relevant qualification descriptors in the qualifications frameworks.

Above the threshold or minimum, individual degree-awarding bodies are responsible for defining their own academic standards. This includes setting pass marks and determining the grading/marketing schemes and any criteria for classification of qualifications that differentiate between levels of student achievement above (and below) the threshold.

QAA does not advise degree awarding bodies how to do this, however, *Chapter A2* of the Quality Code describes the need for degree-awarding bodies' standards to be set out in their academic frameworks and assessment regulations and for these to be transparent, comprehensive and consistently applied. In addition, some Subject Benchmark Statements set out standards for 'typical' and 'excellent' students as well as threshold standards.

For further information you may find it helpful to look at *Chapter B6* of the Quality Code.

5 I attend an institute that is a part of a university and offers vocational training. The institute's marking scheme differs from every other provider of vocational legal similar training, in that it sets a higher standard for the achievement of commendation and distinction. You need over 70 per cent for a commendation and over 80 per cent for a distinction.

This means that, when competing for the same jobs, graduates of our competitor with an average mark of 70 get a distinction, while those of my institute, with an average of 69.9, only get a pass.

Does the Quality Code say anything about whether this is acceptable?

The first thing to confirm is the type of qualification to which you refer. You mention that it is 'vocational training'. It may be that the award is not a higher education qualification awarded by the University, but one awarded by a professional or regulatory body, or an awarding body regulated by Ofqual. If that is the case, the threshold standards and marking criteria will be those set by that awarding body, and do not fall within the remit of the Quality Code.

If it is a higher education qualification, awarded by the degree-awarding body, then it is important to remember that there is a distinction between 'threshold academic standards', which are the minimum acceptable level of achievement that a student has to demonstrate to be eligible for an academic award, and 'academic standards' which are the standards that individual degree-awarding bodies set and maintain for the award of their qualifications, and which may exceed the threshold standards.

Part A of QAA's Quality Code includes the national *Qualifications Frameworks* which set out the threshold standards for higher education qualifications at various levels (undergraduate, master's and doctoral levels, for example). Individual degree-awarding bodies are required by Part A to ensure that UK threshold academic standards are met in their awards.

Above the threshold or minimum, individual degree-awarding bodies are responsible for defining their own academic standards. This includes setting pass marks and determining any criteria for classification of qualifications that differentiate between levels of student achievement above (and below) the threshold. There is therefore nothing to prevent them from setting higher standards for certain classifications than other providers. However, measures of performance and classification should be explicit, transparent and accessible to those who need to know about them.

For further information see Part A and *Chapter B6* of the Quality Code. The relevant professional body would also be a useful source of information.

It may be worth bearing in mind that there is no absolute value to any numerical marks or alpha-numeric grades used. The value of the mark or grade assigned is defined by the assessment criteria and marking schemes associated with them. So if the assessment criteria for a pass are linked to a 40 per cent mark at one university and to a 50 per cent mark at another university, it does not necessarily imply that one marking scheme is more demanding than the other. It simply means that they are using different marking schemes to define an equivalent standard (a pass). To understand the differences in academic standards between universities it is necessary to look at the relative demand of the programme outcomes and the assessment criteria used in the marking schemes to test these.

Designing programmes and developing qualifications

Relevant components of the Quality Code:

Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards, including:

The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies (Qualifications Frameworks)

Subject Benchmark Statements

Chapter B1: Programme Design, Development and Approval

1 I am enquiring on behalf of the Association of X. In order to gain the proficiency certificate that we award, the student needs to complete satisfactorily 100+ hours of practice plus 50-100 hours of home study. However, in order to get onto the course in the first place, the student needs to have completed either a 2 year (full-time) or 3 year (part-time) course in a complementary discipline. I would like to know if we can include this 2 or 3yr pre-requisite in whatever diploma or award we would like to create.

You imply that the award is made by the Association of X itself. If this is the case, it would not fall within QAA's remit, as it is not an award made by a UK degree-awarding body and, therefore, cannot be assigned a level on the *Qualifications Frameworks*.

If the Association is making an award which is not on the *Qualifications Frameworks* nor regulated by Ofqual (see www.register.ofqual.gov.uk), it can include whatever it likes in the award, but it should make clear to students taking the programme that the award is not on the *Qualifications Frameworks* or Ofqual regulated.

If the Association would like its certificates to be formally recognised as higher education, it will need to seek recognition and validation from a degree-awarding body. In this situation, depending on the individual degree-awarding body's regulations, it would not be impossible for a certain volume of credit from prior learning to count towards the final qualification. However, there is a distinction between prior learning used for admission to a programme (where, in effect, it is an entry qualification), and prior learning which is used to count towards an award. For further information see *Chapters B2 and B6* of the Quality Code.

2 We are considering developing a new MBA, where professional development and strategic thinking are built into the course itself thereby allowing for wider entry criteria including those without management experience. Would this approach be compatible with the description of the MBA in the master's degree Subject Benchmark Statement?

We would advise caution because you need to make sure the distinctive elements of an MBA that the statement describes remain in your programme. The current (2007) statement describes the MBA as 'a career development generalist programme for those who have significant post-graduation and relevant work experience on which the learning process should build'.

If you are considering PSRB accreditation of your MBA, deviation from the Subject Benchmark Statement's description may make accreditation more difficult to obtain.

3 Who is responsible for designing UK degree courses (undergraduate and/or postgraduate)?

UK degree-awarding bodies are responsible for designing degree programmes.

Bodies with degree awarding powers in the UK (such as universities) are autonomous and self-governing. This means that they have responsibility for the awards they make, including the academic standards of those awards and the learning opportunities they provide which enable students to achieve the standards. There is no national curriculum for higher education in the UK nor is there a process of national accreditation.

However, degree awarding bodies design their programmes within the context of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code), published by QAA, which sets out the Expectations that all providers of higher education are required to meet.

According to the Quality Code, all programmes need to align with the appropriate level for the qualification as set out in the qualifications frameworks (FHEQ/FQHEIS), which can be found in Part A of the Quality Code.

When designing programmes, degree-awarding bodies are also required to refer to the relevant Subject Benchmark Statement or statements. These statements describe what gives a discipline its coherence and identity, and define what can be expected of a graduate in terms of the abilities and skills needed to develop understanding or competence in the subject.

Detailed information about the processes used to design degree programmes and gain approval of the awarding body can be found in *Chapter B1* of the Quality Code.

QAA reviews check how well individual higher education providers meet the Expectations of the Quality Code (www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review).

4 Is there anything definitive within the Quality Code which stipulates that first year modules should be taught exclusively at level 4 only?

No there isn't.

The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies, a component of Part A of the Quality Code, states that it is up to individual degree-awarding bodies to decide how programmes are structured in relation to the levels of the qualification framework.

You may find it helpful to look at *Chapter B1* of the Quality Code which suggests that in designing a programme, higher education providers bear in mind the concept of progression through the programme.

Requirements stipulated by any accrediting, professional or regulatory body may also need to be taken into account.

5 I am interested in how QAA defines and evaluates progression from year 1 to year 3 on a BA course at a UK university, and whether there are any special guidelines for humanities subjects. I have looked at the Quality Code, but I have not found anything pertinent apart from some references in *Chapter B4*, and a brief survey of good practice in English. Can you direct me to some more specific information?

QAA does not provide guidance on progression requirements for programmes of study. Individual degree-awarding bodies (such as universities) are independently responsible for defining progression arrangements on their programmes.

For further information we recommend that you start by looking at your own university's academic frameworks and assessment regulations.

More detailed explanation of degree-awarding bodies' responsibilities can be found in Part A of the Quality Code.

You may also find it useful to consult the Subject Benchmark Statement for English (www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/subject-benchmark-statements/honours-degree-subjects).

Double, dual and joint degrees

Relevant components of the Quality Code:

Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards

Chapter B10: Managing Higher Education Provision with Others

1 How do UK universities that offer joint PhDs with European universities handle the constitution of the examination panel? We are in negotiations with a partner which is trying to insist that the supervisor also acts as one of the examiners. We have said this isn't acceptable but is there a mechanism for managing this?

Chapter B11 of the Quality Code suggests that none of the candidate's supervisors should be appointed as an examiner. You will therefore need to ensure that your potential partner for the joint qualification is willing to accommodate this, as a requirement to which you as a UK awarding body adhere in order to secure your own and UK threshold academic standards.

It may be that a bespoke set of regulations needs to be drawn up which reflect the non-negotiable elements of both awarding bodies (these can sometimes involve provision for two examinations). In doing so, you will find it helpful to be clear about what are points of substantive principle (which might be achieved in more than one way), and what are procedures which are simply a means to achieving a specific end, which may be varied and may be drawn from either institution's procedures.

If a requirement is non-negotiable for both partners you may wish to review whether both parties have selected appropriate partners for this activity.

Chapter B10 of the Quality Code makes clear that academic standards are the responsibility of the degree-awarding body and that where learning is delivered by others they must ensure that it is equivalent to the standards which they set for the other qualifications which they confer. It includes some information on research degrees, so we recommend that you refer to both *Chapters B10* and *B11* of the Quality Code in detail.

Equality and Diversity

Relevant components of the Quality Code:

General Introduction

1 I have recently been made responsible for ensuring that disabled students and students from ethnic minorities are treated equitably throughout their time at my college. I would value your advice about the areas of particular sensitivity to which I should pay particular attention.

We are not able to provide specific advice in this area, but the General Introduction to the Quality Code sets out how equality and diversity matters are considered throughout the Code and provides information about how to interpret the Code in the context of The Equality Act 2010 (www.ecu.ac.uk).

External examining

Relevant components of the Quality Code:

Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards

Chapter B7: External Examining

1 I am currently acting as an external examiner at a university for one of their MSc programmes. The university is using 40 per cent as its pass mark, although I'm sure that this is not what was recommended in the Quality Code. Does the Quality Code specify a pass mark, and if so, please could you refer me to the right section?

The Quality Code does not make any recommendations about pass marks. Degree awarding bodies are responsible for setting their own pass marks and associated marks schemes and grading criteria.

The marking criteria for a 'pass' would, however, have to be aligned with the relevant qualification descriptor in the *Qualifications Frameworks*. Qualification descriptors set out the generic outcomes and attributes expected for the award of a particular type of qualification (the threshold standards). Some Subject Benchmark Statements provide further information about the threshold standards required for master's degrees but this would depend on the subject.

For further information on degree awarding bodies' responsibilities regarding assessment and external examining, you may wish to refer to Part A of the Quality Code (particularly *Chapters A2 and A3*), and *Chapters B6 and B7*.

2 I have read the relevant parts of *Chapter B7* of the Quality Code and want to understand the role of the external examiner in further detail. I made a subject access request to obtain details of my personal records from the university and am seeking clarification of the following:

- **the external examiner deemed an extension that the university gave me due to extenuating circumstances for medical grounds as sufficient - are they able or qualified to make such a judgment as they are not medically qualified to give an opinion?**
- **is an external examiner able to comment on disability and, if so, should the university have supplied their code of practice in relation to disability to the external examiner?**
- **is it correct that the final examination board should take the external examiner's report as full and final evidence and refer to this as the basis for the award of the final degree classification?**
- **can an external examiner be the final arbiter of an award?**

The role of the external examiner is to help degree-awarding bodies assure the standards and quality of the qualifications they award. Their role is principally about overseeing assessment processes at programme/award or module level, or both, and not about reaching decisions on individual pieces of assessed work.

Chapter B7: External Examining of the Quality Code explains how the specific responsibility of each external examiner is dependent on the role allocated by the provider on appointment, and may be at different levels depending on the nature of the provision and the way in which a provider's decision-making processes about assessment are structured.

For further information on the different responsibilities that an external examiner might take on, we recommend that you read this Chapter.

In relation to the first bullet point of your question, again, *Chapter B7* can provide full details but, to summarise, the external examiner checks whether the provider applied its own rules and regulations when granting the extension. If the examiner finds that this was the case, then no further action is required. In order to undertake this, the examiner does not need to be medically qualified.

Regarding your second bullet, it is not within the external examiner's remit to comment on a disability. The external will consider disability only in the context of checking whether the provider applies consistently and fairly its own rules about mitigating or extenuating circumstances.

In response to bullets three and four, the external examiner is not concerned with individual cases unless his or her advice is sought by the exam board (for example, in difficult cases). Their report is concerned with system-level assurance of standards and quality, not with individual assessment decisions. It is not given to the exam board but to a named contact in the degree-awarding body after the board has completed its deliberations (usually someone with senior responsibility for standards and quality). The final decision rests with the examination board as a whole and not the external examiner. However, the examination board consider the external's views.

If you still have concerns, we recommend that you raise these with your university in the first instance, for example through its concerns and/or complaints procedures.

3 Please can you clarify the intended meaning of the Quality Code, *Chapter B7* Indicator 5, b. (iv):

'Institutions do not appoint as external examiners anyone in the following categories or circumstances: [...]

(iv) anyone who is, or knows they will be, in a position to influence significantly the future of students on the programme of study.'

This statement is deliberately broad. It does not attempt to specify all possibilities but to identify the kinds of conflict of interest that might occur. Examples of this sort of situation might be where a potential external is also a sponsor of a student on the programme, an employer or within the same employment and in a relationship such as line manager, or involved as a placement provider for the programme.

Potentially, but perhaps less likely, the potential external might be involved in admitting students to their own institution (to which a student might be applying). The key clause, however, is 'knows they will be ... influenced significantly'.

The key point to consider is the external examiner's ability to exert influence beyond their potential role as an external examiner.

4 Please can you clarify *Chapter B7* Indicator 5, b. (i), relating to conflicts of interest? This reads as follows:

b. Institutions do not appoint as external examiners anyone in the following categories or circumstances:

- i. member of a governing body or committee of the appointing institution or one of its collaborative partners, or a current employee of the appointing institution or one of its collaborative partners.**

Does this mean that the existence of one small collaborative course (whether undergraduate or postgraduate) in one department should prevent that collaborative partner's staff from acting as external examiners for undergraduate and postgraduate courses in other subjects, departments or faculties?

The reason that collaborative partners or organisations that work with the degree-awarding body are included here is because there is a perceived risk that anyone appointed from such an organisation will compromise the criterion of independence from the degree-awarding body. For these purposes, they are deemed akin to being an employee of the awarding body.

A degree-awarding body might judge, having considered an individual case carefully, that the risk would be minimal in the event that an appointment was made to a different department or faculty of the institution. However, providers are advised to deal with this as an exception to the appointment criteria and policies. They need to demonstrate that the institution has carefully and transparently considered the risk in the circumstances and that there is a legitimate reason for departing from the usual criteria. Such an arrangement would be unlikely where the pool of examiners is wide enough to draw from elsewhere.

More detailed guidance on making exceptions is included in the *Chapter B7*.

5 I have two queries relating to *Chapter B7* of the Quality Code, Indicator 5.

First, Indicator 5, b. (ix) states that institutions should avoid 'the appointment of more than one external examiner from the same department of the same institution.'

Is this requirement designed to ensure that there are never two externals on an examining team from the same department for a particular programme of study. Or does it mean that, a university can only ever have one external per department?

If the latter, this will represent a change of practice for us as we have appointed two people from the same department in the past, but never to the same programme. For example, there may be a Department of Law and Finance at institution X whereas, at university Y, our law and our finance awards sit in different departments. In this situation we may have appointed a law academic for our Department of Law programmes and a financial academic from the same department for our Department of Finance programmes.

My second question is about criterion b. (vi) which states that there should be a five-year gap between being a student or member of staff of the institution and accepting an external examiner appointment. However, criteria (i) to (v) only appear to prevent those with current engagements being appointed as externals.

Was there a discussion in the working group about whether there should be an intervening period between other types of engagement and appointment as an external? How long might this period be?

The purpose of b. (ix) is indeed to prevent a degree-awarding body appointing two external examiners from the same department of another institution rather than being a restriction on the number of appointments that can be made to an individual programme of study or department. It is focused on the institution and department from which appointments are being drawn. The number of appointments made by an individual degree-awarding body, and how these are allocated to programmes and modules is a matter for that body. This clarification would, therefore, imply that you need to make a change to your practice.

Criterion (ix) was intended to encourage institutions to draw from a wider pool of externals rather than taking two from the same department of an institution. Of course there may be circumstances where this proves difficult (for example where the pool for a particular subject is very limited). In such circumstances, approval of the appointment would require an exception to the criterion to be made. Here the organisational structure of the institution from which you are appointing obviously plays a part. For instance, had the law and finance provision been located in separate departments, there would be no problem.

In response to your second question, criteria in b (i-iv) clearly preclude the appointment of those holding current engagements. There was no discussion by the group of a minimum period of time which might need to elapse for (i-iv), nor what this period of time might be. The general principle to adhere to is ensuring that all externals are independent of the institution. In some cases you might need to consider whether any residual conflict of interest exists, and this might need to be done on an individual basis.

6 Does QAA have any views on a PSRB wanting responsibility for appointing the external examiners, as a condition of accreditation? The PSRB does not permit us to publish these external examiner reports.

If the qualifications concerned are awarded by a degree-awarding body and are located on the FHEQ/FQHEIS then the degree-awarding body is responsible for the appointment of the external examiner to oversee the standards and quality of the academic qualification.

PSRBs may appoint their own external examiners for professional qualifications. If the qualifications concerned are not on the FHEQ/FQHEIS then the arrangements of the relevant awarding body (not a degree-awarding body) would apply and we cannot comment on these.

Chapter B7: External Examining of the Quality Code does not require external examiner reports to be 'published' but to be shared with students (which is not the same as publishing). It might therefore be that the PSRB is content with reports being shared internally and you could clarify this with them. However, this again depends on what type of body is making the award.

Information for students

Relevant components of the Quality Code:

Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

1 I am an international student studying for a master's degree and I have recently requested a transfer from one campus in the UK to another. I have been asked to pay £1,140 for the transfer.

I know that Part C of the Quality Code requires the provider to make clear all fees and charges that a student might face. Are there any other reference points within the Quality Code?

The provision of information about fees is also covered in *Chapter B2* of the Quality Code, which similarly makes clear the need to publish, at an early stage, information about all the fees and other costs of study that might apply to each programme.

The main issue here is whether the university made it clear to you that fees could be charged before you entered into the contract to study with them.

It may be worth you examining the 'contract' - which probably means that you will need to look at the regulations of the university - as in most cases students sign up to abide by the regulations, statutes and so on which form the 'the contract'. Your Students' Union should be able to help you with this.

If the fee is not being collected by the university (your degree-awarding body) you may wish to alert the university to this fee and seek their advice.

2 I would like to clarify what is required with respect to the Quality Code Part C, Indicator 4:

Information on the programme of study is made available to current students at the start of their programme and throughout their studies.

Indicator 4 of Part C provides an indication of one of the things that a provider might do in order to ensure that it is meeting the Expectation set out at the beginning of Part C. Specifically it concerns the sort of information that might be provided to current students (as opposed, for example, to prospective students) and when. The explanatory text that accompanies the Indicator provides more detailed guidance.

Part C deliberately does not set out how, or in what precise way, this information should be provided. There are a variety of media through which information on the programme may be made available (which includes programme specifications but this specific format is no longer a requirement). It is up to providers to decide on the formats they use.

For further information, *Chapter A2* of Part A sets out what is expected of definitive records of approved programmes of study (which would be the source of the information provided to students on their programme of study). Again the precise format of these is not prescribed but is a matter for individual degree-awarding bodies.

3 How can a student charter be written when a provider works with multiple awarding bodies? Are numerous student charters required? Could this lead to confusion and issues with dissemination? What is QAA's guidance on this matter?

QAA does not provide any guidance on student charters as the Quality Code does not require providers to have student charters.

Part C of the Quality Code discusses the obligation to ensure that students know what the provider expects of them and what they can expect of the provider. But it is up to providers to decide how this is disseminated.

Chapter B5 of the Quality Code notes how a student charter might be used to communicate a provider's definition of student engagement but, again, there is no requirement to use one.

Where a provider works as a delivery organisation for a degree-awarding body, students are in a relationship with both the delivery organisation and the degree-awarding body. This is complex, but the individual students should not need to experience this complexity directly. Rather there is an obligation on the providers concerned to produce fit for purpose, accessible information for each of their intended audiences. Each student needs to know what is expected of them by their degree-awarding body and their delivery organisation and what they can expect of each of those organisations.

The situation is further complicated if a provider has relationships with more than one degree-awarding body, each of which has their own student charter or requirements. However, in many cases these documents are at a sufficiently high level of generality that it may be possible for the provider to construct a student charter or other form of statement of its own which will meet the needs and reflect the requirements of several partners.

4 I would like advice with respect to Part C of the Quality Code, specifically Indicator 6, which requires higher education providers to issue students with a detailed record of their studies as evidence of achievements in their academic programme.

I have completed a one year full-time diploma at a college and I expected to be issued with a European Diploma Supplement. However, the college have told me that their interpretation of Part C is that it only applies to graduates and post graduates.

Is this an accurate interpretation, given that over 50 per cent of the students on my course are from overseas? I feel that the college are not meeting their obligation under Indicator 6.

Should the college have informed me of their position at the time enrolment? Should I pursue this through the college's internal complaints process?

Unless the diploma which you describe is awarded by a degree-awarding body and is located at a level of the FHEQ or FQHEIS it will not fall within the remit of QAA or the Quality Code. We recommend that you clarify this with the college, in the first instance.

However, it may be helpful to know that although Indicator 6 of Part C of the Quality Code sets out sound practice in providing students with a suitable record of their studies and academic achievements, it does not define the form which this should take. There is no assumption that this should be a European Diploma Supplement. The precise format of records of studies depends on the awarding body and the nature of the qualification and any national requirements or guidance.

Languages - teaching or assessing in more than one

Relevant components of the Quality Code:

Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching

Chapter B6: Assessment of Students and the Recognition of Prior Learning

1 Currently at my university we deliver awards wholly in English. However, we are beginning to investigate what we would need to do in order to deliver an award in two languages.

It is not clear whether you mean that students in the same room will learn through the medium of two languages or whether the same programme will be taught to one cohort in English and another in a different language. Each approach would present different challenges.

You may find it helpful first to consider whether or not certain students may be unfairly advantaged or disadvantaged by either of these arrangements. This might include thinking about such matters as:

- securing appropriately qualified staff (including external examiners), both in terms of subject expertise and language proficiency
- ensuring there are adequate learning resources and support, both material and human (such as access to journals or technical/pastoral support respectively), in both languages
- how to secure academic standards and fairness if the language of tuition and the language of assessment are different.

There are also questions to consider around translation and arrangements for external examining.

Chapter B6 of the Quality Code talks about conducting assessment in languages other than English.

You may also find it useful to look at a case study from our transnational education series which alludes to dual language provision, *Case study 4: Managing assessment in a foreign language: The University of Wales and the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences* (www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/review-of-overseas-provision/review-of-transnational-education-in-mainland-china-2012).

2 We are developing some provision overseas with partners. I want to enquire about provision offered in a language other than English, specifically the requirement to have a bilingual member of on-campus staff, as well as a bilingual external examiner.

Is there any guidance in areas such as assessment that relates to the specific type of on-campus support that universities would be expected to offer?

QAA does not set out specific requirements for assessment in languages other than English and there is no requirement for a bilingual member of staff 'on campus'. However, providers that permit assessment in languages other than those in which they ordinarily work do need to be confident that they can assure the academic standards of the awards made in their name.

Chapter B10 of the Quality Code refers to the need to have an ongoing availability of internal as well as external examiners who are able to work in all the languages concerned, but it does not refer to them needing to be 'on campus'. *Chapter B6* points out the need for degree-awarding bodies to be sure that the standards of their awards are not compromised as a result of conducting assessment in a language other than English, and addresses the need to exercise caution in translation of assessed work.

The QAA publication *Guidelines for higher education institutions in Wales for effective practice in examining and assessing in a language other than the language of tuition* may also be helpful (www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/guidelines-assessing-Welsh).

3 Is an additional external examiner required for collaborative provision that is taught and assessed in English, but where the programme includes translation modules (with the translation from their own language into English).

The need for an additional external will depend on whether the existing external(s) has the expertise in the language(s) in question to assure the standards of the assessment and make valid judgements about student achievement.

This principle applies equally to the internal examiners. You need to assure yourself of the appropriateness of internal staff to deliver the type of learning and required support.

Online learning

Relevant components of the Quality Code:

Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching

1 I'm a higher education researcher and would like to know whether there is any specific reference material within the Quality Code relating to online learning.

The Quality Code does not single out particular forms of learning or delivery on which to provide specific guidance, but operates at a higher level of principle.

Learning and teaching in general, including e-learning, is covered by *Chapter B3*; but other chapters would also be relevant (for example, *Chapter B6: Assessment of Students and the Recognition of Prior Learning*).

Programme specifications

Relevant components of the Quality Code:

Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards

1 Please can you advise on the current position re Programme Specifications?

Programme specifications per se are not a requirement of the Quality Code, and the programme specification guidelines that QAA used to publish are no longer available. Part A of the Quality Code, Expectation A2.2 sets out what is required with regard to programme records, as follows:

'Degree-awarding bodies maintain a definitive record of each programme and qualification that they approve (and of subsequent changes to it) which constitutes the reference point for delivery and assessment of the programme, its monitoring and review, and for the provision of records of study to students and alumni.'

Please refer to the full chapter for further information and explanation.

2 I understand from Part A of the Quality Code that there is no longer a requirement to provide Programme Specifications. Does this mean that the format of the official record/specification of the programme is up to individual institutions? In this context what is the current status of the QAA guidelines for preparing programme specifications? Will these be updated to reflect the new Part A?

You are right that the format of the definitive record is now a matter for individual degree-awarding bodies to determine. Expectation A2.2 sets out a requirement for degree-awarding bodies to maintain a definitive record of programmes and qualifications, but does not specify the format in which this information is held.

The programme specification guidelines that QAA used to publish are no longer available and will not be updated. The Introduction to Part A states that '*Chapter A2* supersedes the Guidelines for preparing programme specifications which are now replaced by Expectation A2.2.'

Qualifications frameworks

Relevant components of the Quality Code:

Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards, including:

The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies (Qualifications Frameworks)

1 Do the *Qualifications Frameworks* extend to the Channel Islands? If not, how do I find out how my qualification compares to qualifications awarded in England and Scotland?

The *Qualifications Frameworks* (the FHEQ and the FQHEIS for Scotland) only apply to awarding bodies located in the UK and not to awarding bodies in the Channel Islands. However, they apply to all UK awarding bodies irrespective of where qualifications are delivered.

So, if your qualification was delivered in the Channel Islands but awarded by a UK 'recognised body' (a body that can award degrees), one of the *Qualifications Frameworks* would apply. You will be able to find out if the awarding body for your qualification is a recognised body by looking at your certificate.

If your qualification is not awarded by a UK degree-awarding body, you may find it helpful to consult the National Recognition Information Centre (UK NARIC) (www.naric.org.uk/naric).

Qualification levels

Relevant components of the Quality Code:

Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards, including:

The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies

(Qualifications Frameworks)

Higher education credit framework for England: Guidance on academic credit arrangements in higher education in England

1 I have received an application from a student with a BMChB. At what level of the FHEQ is a BMChB positioned? Is the degree equivalent to, or higher than, a first degree? Are medical degrees classified?

A BMChB is a first degree in medicine and it typically sits at level 7 on the FHEQ/SCQF and level 11 on the FQHEIS. This means it is equivalent to a master's degree and is higher than a bachelor's degree with honours (which is at level 6 of the FHEQ or SCQF, level 10 of the FQHEIS). Medical degrees are not classified. For further information, see the *Qualifications Frameworks*.

2 Is a Doctor of Medicine (MD) the highest academic qualification that a medical doctor can achieve in the UK? Is the Doctor of Medicine (MD) equivalent to a PhD degree?

An MD is a doctoral degree, which means that it is assigned to level 8 of the FHEQ or SCQF level 12 on the FQHEIS. This is the highest level in the UK frameworks for higher education qualifications and is also the level at which the PhD sits.

Further guidance about the MD and the similarities and differences between the characteristics of various types of degrees at this level is available in the *Doctoral Degree Characteristics Statement*.

3 Is there anything definitive within the Quality Code which stipulates that first year modules should be taught exclusively at level 4 only?

No there isn't.

The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies, a component of Part A of the Code, states that it is up to individual degree-awarding bodies to decide how programmes are structured in relation to the levels of the qualification framework.

You may find it helpful to look at *Chapter B1* of the Quality Code which suggests that in designing a programme, higher education providers bear in mind the concept of progression through the programme.

Requirements stipulated by any accrediting professional or regulatory body may also need to be taken into account.

Qualifications - making comparisons

Relevant components of the Quality Code:

Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards, including:
The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies (Qualifications Frameworks)

1 I have completed two postgraduate diplomas, one of which included a 10,000 word dissertation. Is this equivalent to a 'master's qualification or can the two PG diplomas together equate to a master's degree?

Postgraduate diplomas and master's degrees are at the same level on the *Qualifications Frameworks* (level 7 on the FHEQ or SCQF level 11 on the FQHEIS) but they are different qualifications with different learning outcomes. This means that a postgraduate diploma cannot be equivalent to a master's degree and neither can a combination of two postgraduate diplomas.

Qualifications are awarded on the basis of a learner demonstrating that they have achieved the learning outcomes for a specific programme of study. As such, they cannot be obtained through the accumulation of credits or learning experiences from a range of different sources. The *Qualifications Frameworks* explain this in more detail.

It is possible, in some cases, for a postgraduate diploma (or parts of it) to be recognised as prior learning towards a master's degree. However, this would depend on the master's and diploma programmes concerned. In order to look into this, you would need to identify a master's programme that you wish to take and then find out from the degree awarding body whether or not they would consider recognising your prior learning.

2 I have a Scottish ordinary degree and need to know whether it is equivalent to a 2:2 English Honours degree. I gained 360 credits from my degree, which on the table in the HE Credit Framework for England appears to be equal to an honours degree.

To find out about the relationship between Scottish and English degrees, you need to look at the *Qualifications Frameworks*, rather than the national credit frameworks. These frameworks indicate the levels of typical qualifications and types of qualification.

A Scottish ordinary degree is a bachelor's (non-honours) degree. Such degrees in Scotland are broadly equivalent to bachelor's degrees in England, Wales and Northern Ireland but not to bachelor's degrees with honours. They are a different type of qualification to an honours degree and so not equivalent to a 2:2 bachelor's degree with honours in England.

Bachelors' degrees in Scotland have more credits than their UK counterparts because of the different educational systems and the longer period of study, but credits do not indicate the level or type of the qualification.

3 I have received an application from a student with a BMChB. At what level of the FHEQ is a BMChB positioned? Is the degree equivalent to, or higher than, a first degree? Are medical degrees classified?

A BMChB is a first degree in medicine and it typically sits at level 7 on the FHEQ/SCQF and level 11 on the FQHEIS. This means it is equivalent to a master's degree and is higher than a bachelor's degree with honours (which is at level 6 of the FHEQ or SCQF, level 10 of the FQHEIS). Medical degrees are not classified. For further information, see the *Qualifications Frameworks*.

Qualifications - miscellaneous

Relevant components of the Quality Code

Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards, including:
The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies (Qualifications Frameworks)

1 Are the academic regulations for the award and classification of degrees the same for each University in the UK?

No. Degree-awarding bodies are autonomous and have different rules and regulations about precisely what students have to achieve to be eligible for the award of a degree (provided that they all meet the national threshold standard set out in Part A of the Quality Code for the relevant type of degree). They also all have different rules about the calibration or classifications of awards above the threshold. The degree-awarding body is expected to follow the rules it has set for itself in its regulations and to be clear about where and how it can use discretion.

2 How can I find out whether a master's degree obtained from a private provider, validated by a degree-awarding body, is quality assured? How can I find out whether the providers and the qualifications are recognised?

You can check whether the master's degree is awarded by a recognised UK degree-awarding body (www.gov.uk/recognised-uk-degrees).

To find out about the validated private provider, you will need to refer to the Listed Bodies Order. This records providers that do not have the power to award their own degrees, but provide full programmes that lead to a foundation, bachelor's, master's or doctoral degree of a recognised body (www.gov.uk/check-a-university-is-officially-recognised/listed-bodies).

If a UK degree-awarding body makes the award, then that body will be a subscriber to QAA and therefore will be quality assured. You can access reports of reviews that QAA has undertaken of the degree-awarding body on QAA's website. In addition, all its qualifications must align with the requirements of Part A of the Quality Code, including the *Qualifications Frameworks*.

3 Can my Foundation Degree count towards a Bachelor's award? The awarding institutions for my Foundation Degree and the Bachelors' degree that I am interested in are the same. The University's regulations would appear to suggest that credit from within the institution is more readily recognised than that from outside.

A key feature of foundation degrees is that they are provided with opportunities for successful progression toward another qualification. Higher education providers awarding foundation degrees may guarantee progression to at least one bachelor degree with honours, and a range of routes may be available, some of which are more commonly used than others. Information for students about progression arrangements is available through course handbooks and prospectuses.

If you are interested in a bachelor's degree which is not linked to your foundation degree in this way, then your foundation degree cannot count towards the bachelor's award. This is because foundation degrees and bachelor's degrees are two discrete qualifications, and qualifications are awarded on the basis a learner demonstrating that they have achieved the learning outcomes for a specific programme of study. It may be possible to undertake a bridging programme but you would need to discuss this with the provider.

This 'outcomes-based' approach to the award of qualifications is described in Part A of the Quality Code.

Qualifications and professional standards

Relevant components of the Quality Code:

Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards, including:

The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies (Qualifications Frameworks)

1 I have been asked to develop a formal qualification for a professional body. The qualification is likely to be at certificate, diploma or degree level. What do I need to do to have the qualification assessed and accredited?

If you wish to develop a programme leading to a higher education qualification you need to find a degree-awarding body willing to work with you to make the award. For further information, see *Chapter B10: Managing Higher Education Provision with Others* of the Quality Code.

We would recommend that you approach a degree-awarding body prior to developing the course/qualification, to ensure that it meets the design requirements and academic standards of that awarding body. We would also recommend that you select a degree-awarding body with in-house expertise in the same or a related field.

If the proposed development is a higher level vocational qualification, you should contact Ofqual which is responsible for regulating this area (www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofqual).

2 I have an MSc in Mechanical Engineering. Are you able to advise if this qualification confers any status as a qualified engineer? I have considerable post qualification practice and experience in the engineering field as well as professional experience.

QAA is not able to advise directly on this. In the first instance you should ask the provider of the MSc to find out whether it was accredited or recognised by a professional body and, if so, by whom and the extent of the accreditation.

Professional recognition in Engineering tends to be based on a combination of academic achievement and continuing professional development so you would then need to refer to the relevant professional body to find out what 'status' you might be eligible for, based on your academic record and any professional experience/development.

3 Can a PGCE be awarded independently of Qualified Teacher Status (QTS)? Do we have to wait until a partner organisation has recommended QTS before an award of PGCE can be given?

A PGCE can be awarded independently of QTS. The award of the PGCE is an academic qualification made on the basis of successful completion of an approved programme offered by a UK degree-awarding body. It is not dependent on the granting of QTS.

On the other hand QTS cannot be awarded without a PGCE. However, it is possible for an individual to have a PGCE but not be eligible for QTS. (For example a student who achieves the PGCE may be deemed unfit to practise for non-academic reasons and therefore not be admitted to the profession.)

For more information on QTS, we recommend that you contact the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL), part of the Department for Education.

4 Can a PGCE be awarded with the EYTS rather than QTS?

This is a matter for the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL). We recommend that you contact them directly for advice.

5 I understand that QAA now has responsibility for the quality assurance of law degrees which was previously under the remit of the Joint Academic Stage Board.

I would like to know whether there is still a requirement for there to be a minimum number of students for a validated law degree.

Also, is such a requirement of universal application for an institution seeking validation of its undergraduate degrees, regardless of subject?

The Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) and the Bar Standards Board (BSB) now rely on provider's compliance with the Quality Code to assure academic standards and quality. However, validated programmes must also meet additional requirements set out by the SRA and the BSB.

The Quality Code does not include any requirements relating to a minimum cohort size for a higher education programmes, but degree-awarding bodies typically establish their own minimum intakes (both to assure the student experience and to ensure financial viability).

We recommend that you contact the SRA and/or the BSB for further information.

Qualification titles

Relevant components of the Quality Code:

Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards, including:

The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies (Qualifications Frameworks)

1 What qualification titles are available for integrated master's awards? For example, my institution offers the MChem and MEng. Are there other accepted qualification titles, such as for integrated master's in social sciences or humanities subjects?

Individual degree awarding bodies have the authority to determine their own qualification titles, provided that:

- they have the necessary powers to award the qualifications concerned (this is usually set out in the awarding body's statutes, ordinances or academic regulations)
- the titles are consistent with the titling conventions set out in *Qualifications Frameworks*.

We recommend that you contact the Registry or Academic Office at your university for further information.

2 Is an individual with a DBA from a UK university legally entitled to use the titles 'PhD' and/or 'Dr'?

A DBA, or Doctor of Business Administration, is a doctorate and is assigned to level 8 of the FHEQ, or level 12 of the FQHEIS (see the *Qualifications Frameworks*). This means that an individual with a DBA can use the title 'Dr'. However the DBA is a different qualification to a PhD, so they would not be able to use the abbreviation 'PhD'. Further guidance about different doctoral degrees awarded in the UK can be found in the *Doctoral Degree Characteristics* statement.

3 I am looking for any guidance on the use of 'and' and 'with' in degree award titles. I have found something in the Quality Code Part A, but is there anything more prescriptive?

This is covered by the *Qualifications Frameworks* publication (which is a component of Part A of the Quality Code). It requires the following:

'A and B', where there is an approximately equal balance between two components

'A with B' for a major/minor combination where the minor subject accounts for at least a quarter of the programme.

Research degrees - supervising and examining

Relevant components of the Quality Code:

Chapter B11: Research Degrees

1 We have been having discussions with a partner about the conditions to be attached to their delivery of research supervision for university awards.

While the partner has been operating as if it were a department of the university, we have allowed students to be wholly supervised by their staff, who have been granted honorary university staff status. However, the partner has now been designated as an independent higher education institution.

Mindful of the partner's new independent status, we have suggested that, in future, all research students should have a university supervisor as well as a supervisor from the partner. Our partner is not happy about this and we are therefore seeking your view on whether allowing university registered research students to be wholly supervised by partner staff would fulfil the expectations of *Chapter B11* of the Quality Code?

QAA's guidance on supervision in *Chapter B11: Research Degrees* of the Quality Code is geared towards ensuring that research students receive high quality, well-organised supervision in an environment conducive to doing and learning about research. Ultimately the responsibility for the quality of the postgraduate research student supervisory experience lies with the degree-awarding body but the Chapter doesn't prescribe that research supervisors should be staff of the degree-awarding body.

Although the partner has become an independent higher education institution, its status in respect of the award of your degrees is unchanged for the time being. Presumably, to date, you have found that the supervisors at the partner organisation were sufficiently well qualified and experienced and met the university's criteria for undertaking their role. Unless you have lost confidence in the quality and standards of supervision there is no reason why the university should not regard the partner as a delivery organisation and continue with the previous arrangement.

You will of course need to consider how the delivery organisation integrates with the relevant University department or faculty in terms of other supervisory team roles (such as departmental or faculty graduate tutor) and how it integrates with the university's procedures for monitoring and progression. Any revised arrangements will need to be accommodated in a new or revised agreement.

2 Are academics who have been involved in a PhD student's Progress Review Panel permitted to act as examiners for the same PhD?

Chapter B11: Research Degrees of the Quality Code covers the appointment of internal examiners, but does not contain any explicit guidance on this point. There is no formal requirement that a member of staff should not be a PhD examiner if they have previously participated in a progress review panel for the student concerned. The starting point, however, should be to consult the degree-awarding body's criteria for the appointment of internal examiners.

3 Chapter B11 states (under Indicator 17) that it 'is exceptional to appoint as internal or external examiner researchers who have had substantial co-authoring or collaborative involvement in the candidate's work or whose own work is the focus of the research project.

I think that there may be occasions when it would be entirely appropriate for an examiner to be appointed to a research degree examination where their work has constituted, if not quite a focus of the thesis under examination, then certainly a significant element. Rather than exceptional, such an appointment could even be desirable.

For example, there might be situations where the thesis assessed provides a critique of the examiner's work (thus shedding new light on an established position), or where some data published by the examiner is subject to reanalysis presenting a reinterpretation of the original finding. Other examples might be where an experimental technique is further developed in a PhD, giving rise to some kind of ground breaking discovery.

Are you able to advise or clarify?

The statement in *Chapter B11* does not preclude the appointment, as an examiner, of a researcher whose work has been the focus of the candidate's research project. It simply states that this would be exceptional.

There will be circumstances where such exceptional appointments might be justifiable, or indeed desirable (taking due account of the need to assure fairness to the candidate and consistency of treatment compared with others). Individual degree-awarding bodies might choose to define these circumstances in their appointment criteria.

4 Is a PhD student entitled to know the names of his examiners?

This will depend on the procedures at your degree-awarding body, so we recommend that you consult these in the first instance.

Chapter B11 of the Quality Code, which focuses on research degrees and includes a section on examining, does not prohibit students being informed of the names of their examiners, but it does not state that they are entitled to this.

In our experience, it would be common for students to know the names of their examiners.

5 How do UK universities that offer joint PhDs with European universities handle the constitution of the examination panel? We are in negotiations with a partner which is trying to insist that the supervisor also acts as one of the examiners. We have said this isn't acceptable but is there a mechanism for managing this?

Chapter B11 of the Quality Code suggests that none of the candidate's supervisors should be appointed as an examiner. You will therefore need to ensure that your potential partner for the joint qualification is willing to accommodate this, as a requirement to which you as a UK awarding body adhere in order to secure your own and UK threshold academic standards.

It may be that a bespoke set of regulations needs to be drawn up which reflect the non-negotiable elements of both awarding bodies (these can sometimes involve provision for two examinations). In doing so, you will find it helpful to be clear about what are points of substantive principle (which might be achieved in more than one way), and what are

procedures which are simply a means to achieving a specific end, which may be varied and may be drawn from either institution's procedures.

If a requirement is non-negotiable for both partners you may wish to review whether both parties have selected appropriate partners for this activity.

Chapter B10 of the Quality Code makes clear that academic standards are the responsibility of the degree-awarding body and that where learning is delivered by others they must ensure that it is equivalent to the standards which they set for the other qualifications which they confer. It includes some information on research degrees, so we recommend that you refer to both *Chapters B10* and *B11* of the Quality Code in detail.

Staff qualifications, recruitment and development

Relevant components of the Quality Code:

Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching

1 What level of qualification, skills and/or experience does a higher education teacher need to have?

This is a matter for individual degree-awarding bodies to determine in relation to individual programmes and academic posts. As a minimum, staff should be competent to fulfil their specific role and remain so throughout their career.

Degree-awarding bodies should take account of the level at which staff are teaching and the nature of teaching or other activities that support or inform learning. For more information see *Chapter B3* of the Quality Code.

You may also find it helpful to look at the UK Professional Standards Framework, developed by the Higher Education Academy (www.heacademy.ac.uk/download/what-uk-professional-standards-framework).

This provides a UK-wide benchmark by which higher education providers can demonstrate how they support staff and assure themselves that they are qualified to teach and support learning. It also enables higher education providers to demonstrate that their professional development programmes and activities meet expected national professional standards.

2 Does QAA provide any guidance on teaching observations and how these should be conducted for higher education taught in further education colleges?

QAA does not provide guidance in this area.

You may find it helpful to look at *Chapter B3* of the Quality Code which discusses the importance of reflection and the evaluation of professional practice, and the need for practice to be evidence-based (peer observation can provide one form of evidence).

A good starting point would be to talk to the degree-awarding bodies with which your college works to see how they approach teaching observation, as this will also provide opportunities for sharing practice and experience.

3 Is there a QAA policy about the academic level up to which doctoral students might be permitted to provide laboratory demonstration and teaching?

The Researcher Development Framework and Research Councils suggest that doctoral researchers should gain experience of and training for demonstrating and teaching with a range of positions being taken by academics.

Some of my colleagues consider that it is appropriate for doctoral students to demonstrate up to master's level and teach up to first-degree level, while others suggest that there is QAA guidance that it should *only* be up to first-year degree level for both demonstration and teaching.

QAA does not provide specific guidance on this issue. It is up to individual degree-awarding bodies to decide on the level of responsibilities given to their doctoral students.

However, you may find it helpful to look at *Chapter B11* of the Quality Code. This notes that 'where research students have teaching roles, they receive appropriate training, support and mentoring, for their own benefit and to safeguard the experience of the students they are teaching.'

Similarly, *Chapter B3* of the Quality Code suggests that 'everyone involved in teaching or supporting student learning is appropriately qualified, supported and developed.'

4 Does QAA provide any advice about job application procedures for academics and associates?

No. It is up to individual degree-awarding bodies to design their own procedures.

However, there are examples where the Quality Code indicates the necessity of staff being competent to undertake specific roles and being provided with appropriate support for further staff development. For further information see *Chapters B2, B3 and B4* of the Quality Code.

5 What are the qualification requirements for those tutoring and marking on academic programmes which fall within remit of the UK frameworks for higher education qualifications? For example, would the requirements be different for someone tutoring on a level 5 programme, as compared to someone tutoring and assessing on a level 4 programme?

It is up to the higher education provider, and ultimately the degree-awarding body to decide what is appropriate for those involved in teaching and assessing programmes at different levels. There are no national requirements, and the requirements can be dependent on many factors.

You may find it helpful to look at *Chapter B3* of the Quality Code which makes the point that 'everyone involved in teaching or supporting student learning is appropriately qualified, supported and developed'. You may also find it helpful to look at the UK Professional Standards Framework, developed by the Higher Education Academy (www.heacademy.ac.uk/download/what-uk-professional-standards-framework).

It would not be unusual in many subjects for degree-awarding bodies to expect those teaching on a programme to have qualifications at least equal to the level of the qualification on which they are teaching and usually at one level higher (so, at least a level 7 qualification if teaching on a bachelor's degree).

Student services

Relevant components of the Quality Code:

Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement

1 Please can you tell me how you quality assure student support services, particularly counselling and psychological well-being services?

Are there minimum set standards? How can I compare support services provided by universities?

Where would I find a review of these services within the QAA reviews?

UK universities and colleges are independent, autonomous organisations which decide what student services they need to offer in order to support students' learning and wider experiences.

Chapter B4 of the Quality Code sets out what is generally expected of providers but it does not specify any particular model through which student services, such as counselling, should be made available. This will depend on the circumstances of each individual higher education provider. Minimum standards for particular services are not set by QAA.

QAA checks the extent to which higher education providers are meeting the Expectations in the Quality Code through its review processes, and publishes review reports on our website (www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports).

To find out about services at a particular provider you can look at their most recent review report, but counselling and psychological services may not be specifically mentioned (this will depend on whether or not these were a line of enquiry pursued by the review team).

To look for references to counselling and psychological well-being services across a range of reports you can use the QAA Review Knowledgebases (www.qaa.ac.uk/improving-higher-education/knowledgebase-search).

We recommend that you also investigate, through individual university and college websites, whether any counselling and related services have achieved accreditation or recognition by relevant regulatory bodies.

Study skills

Relevant components of the Quality Code:

Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards, including:
Subject Benchmark Statements

Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching

Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement

1 I am working towards obtaining validation by a university for a postgraduate programme. One of the accredited elements relates to study skills rather than to research and methodology. The university wishes to know whether it is a mandatory requirement for a postgraduate programme to include study skills. If it is mandatory, is there any guidance about expectations of what the minimum notional hours should be for study skills?

There are no national mandatory requirements related to the content of higher education programmes, apart from the need for programme learning outcomes to align with the relevant qualification descriptor (see Part A of the Quality Code for further information).

It is the responsibility of the degree-awarding body to ensure that students develop the skills necessary to complete their programme and to achieve the specific programme outcomes.

Chapters B3 and B4 of the Quality Code and any relevant Subject Benchmark Statements will probably provide you with the most useful guidance on study skills in the context of the Expectations of the Quality Code. You may also find it helpful to look at *Master's Degree Characteristics* (even if the programme concerned is not a master's degree).

Subject Benchmark Statements

Relevant components of the Quality Code:

Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards, including:
Subject Benchmark Statements

1 I am a Programme Director for LLB (Bachelor of Laws) provision. We are considering a minor modification to our level 4 provision in relation to research.

The Law benchmark statement (2007) indicates that students should demonstrate a basic ability to:

- identify accurately the issue(s) which require researching
- identify and retrieve up-to-date legal information, using paper and electronic sources
- use primary and secondary legal sources relevant to the topic under study.

At present we require students to carry out exercises in the library to ensure their use of paper sources. Please could you let us know whether the requirement to use paper sources is current and whether (and by what means) we might otherwise be able to demonstrate students' ability in this area?

Subject Benchmark Statements are not intended as a national curriculum in a subject. Individual degree-awarding bodies are expected to take them into account (see Part A of the Quality Code) but it is up to them to decide how to interpret the guidance that the benchmark statements contain.

It is therefore not expected that every programme would necessarily include every individual aspect detailed in the statement, and the regular monitoring and review of any programme to maintain standards and quality should take into account current developments in the subject area. If the programme is accredited by a professional body, their requirements also need to be considered.

QAA reviews all Subject Benchmark Statements on a seven-year cycle, and a review of the Law statement is currently in progress (www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/subject-benchmark-statements).

2 I am based in an international university, where we have chosen to use QAA materials as reference points for the development of several postgraduate programmes. We have recently developed four programmes a particular subject area, using the relevant Subject Benchmark Statement on your website. We are now seeking to benchmark our doctoral degrees in the same area and I would be grateful if you could advise if there is a statement available for this.

All Subject Benchmark Statements published by QAA are listed on our web pages.

QAA does not produce statements at doctoral level, because doctoral programmes are specific to individual students, dependent on their area of research.

However, there is a generic qualification descriptor for programmes at this level in the *Qualifications Frameworks*.

Further information on the characteristics of various different types of doctoral degrees is available in the publication *Doctoral Degrees Characteristics*.

3 Do you assign numerical codes to the Subject Benchmark Statements? I am considering introducing a new paperless Programme Approval System within the university, and our current approval paperwork includes a field for benchmark codes but I'm not sure what these are.

QAA has never assigned numerical 'codes' to the Subject Benchmark Statements. The field is therefore probably something which was developed internally within your organisation.

However, it is standard practice for programme approval paperwork to require reference to the Subject Benchmark Statement which has been used in developing the programme. This is not something which is formally 'reported on' as such, but it is something which both a programme approval panel and review teams for QAA reviews would expect to see. It shows that the programme has taken account of external, nationally agreed standards. For more information see Part A of the Quality Code.

Validation

Relevant Components of the Quality Code:

Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards

Chapter B10: Managing Higher Education Provision with Others

1 I work for a private training provider which is currently looking at options for the validation of courses via validation agreements with a number of universities. Is it possible to have three or four validating universities for one single programme. Are there any differences in requirements for overseas universities (inside and outside the EU), when validating the programme.

It is not normal practice to have three or four validating universities for one programme. Most degree-awarding bodies would find this unacceptable as it would involve double-counting the same learning for more than one qualification. However, sometimes degree-awarding bodies collaborate with other degree-awarding bodies (either within or outside the UK) to pool their awarding powers and offer a jointly designed and delivered programme leading to a joint qualification or to provide two linked programmes leading to a dual award (two discrete qualifications).

Chapter B10 of the Quality Code provides guidance on qualifications awarded by more than one awarding body (including a glossary which distinguishes between the types of qualification).

QAA's remit extends only to qualifications awarded by UK degree-awarding bodies and the procedures that they might use to validate programmes offered by other providers within or outside the UK. The requirements of universities in other jurisdictions will most certainly be different but QAA is not in a position to comment on these.

2 One of our collaborative partners wishes to offer an award validated by us that is in a discipline that we do not currently offer. Are we required to offer a similar programme area in the university, or employ staff with the relevant expertise within this discipline?

It is not a specific requirement that you have to offer a similar programme nor that you have to employ staff with the relevant disciplinary expertise. However, as you will have ultimate responsibility for academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities you need to assure yourselves that you have access to sufficient disciplinary expertise to discharge this responsibility.

Chapter B10 of the Quality Code makes clear the need for degree-awarding bodies to have in place (or be able to secure) the relevant disciplinary expertise to approve, monitor and, if necessary, deliver teaching, learning and assessment in the range of subject areas envisaged. Degree-awarding bodies have to have the knowledge, experience and intellectual capital to underwrite the relevant awards.

For example, in the event of a delivery organisation withdrawing or terminating an agreement you would be required to ensure that the students can complete their award with the awarding body which may involve teaching the students out. You will need to address how this would be managed.

You will also need to consider how this provision would fit with your mission and the rest of your academic portfolio.

We recommend that you refer to the detail of *Chapter B10* of the Quality Code for further information.

3 When validating a private college's provision, is it acceptable for the College's courses to bear the same names as those offered by the degree awarding body, when the courses themselves are different?

We would be concerned, in this situation, about the potential for the arrangement to be misleading and confusing to prospective and current students and stakeholders.

Please see Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision of the Quality Code for further information.

4 We are preparing to validate provision developed and delivered by a partner institution. During negotiation a question has been raised regarding the certificate that a successful candidate would receive at the end of their studies.

We, as the DAB, would issue the certificate, however the partner would like it to include details of where the student has studied, with the partner's logo/hologram and signature of their head of institution. Is there any guidance on whether this is acceptable?

QAA's guidance on this can be found in *Chapter B10* of the Quality Code. The certificate needs to be clear about the status of the bodies involved, in terms of which body is awarding the degree. The situation which you are describing is that of a classic validation model. In these circumstances, the degree-awarding body would typically state the name and location of the validated partner on the certificate and/or the transcript.

It would be most unusual for the logo and signature of the validated organisation to appear on the certificate (and we are unaware of a precedent). Certificates bear the logo of the awarding authority (both or all in the case of joint awards) and the signature of the officer authorised to confirm or 'certify' an academic award. This is what a 'certificate' is: a certified statement by the body empowered to make an award. It therefore follows that it cannot include the logo or signatures of organisations which have not made the award (but only delivered it on the awarding body's behalf). However, the delivery organisation can issue the transcript if so delegated by your institution and its logo or insignia would appear on that.

It could be seriously misleading (and irregular) if the insignia and signatories of the delivery organisation were to appear on the DAB certificate so you will need to advise your partner of this.

5 We are the validating body of courses delivered by a collaborative partner and we would like to know whether their institution should be named on the certificate of the award, awarded by us. My understanding is that it should be clear on the award certificate where the course delivery has taken place. However, the Quality Code *Chapter B10* refers to the certificate and/or the record of achievement.

Chapter B10 of the Quality Code makes provision for the name and location of the organisation delivering the programme to be recorded on the certificate and/or the transcript because in some jurisdictions (such as Singapore & UAE) it is not legitimate for the name and location of the delivery organisation to be included on the certificate.

Typically, degree-awarding bodies make reference to the delivery organisation on both the certificate and transcript and it is in the interests of clarity and transparency, and of providing information for a full understanding of the qualification taken, to do so. This would be the preferred solution unless there is a legal impediment to details of the delivery organisation being included on the certificate.

Working or collaborating with others

Relevant components of the Quality Code:

Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards

Chapter B10: Managing Higher Education Provision with Others

1 I would like help in clarifying my understanding of *Chapter B10* of the Quality Code. The chapter refers to Degree Awarding Bodies (DABs) rather than Awarding Bodies. We are not (yet) a degree awarding body; however students studying our HE provision at levels 4 and 5 come under the scope of a QAA review. If the Quality Code is referring to degree awarding bodies is it simply referring to universities and higher education institutions that have degree awarding powers?

Yes, it is. *Chapter B10: Managing Higher Education Provision with Others* uses its terms very carefully and defines these in the glossary to the Chapter. When it refers to 'degree-awarding bodies' it means just that: bodies (principally universities and higher education institutions) that have degree-awarding powers granted by statute, by Royal Charter or by the Privy Council following a recommendation from QAA. For more information, see the Introduction to Part A of the Quality Code.

QAA has no jurisdiction over awarding organisations without degree awarding powers, unless and until they acquire degree awarding powers. Most awarding organisations in England (as opposed to degree-awarding bodies) are regulated by Ofqual.

Providers which work with degree-awarding bodies to deliver higher education programmes are referred to in *Chapter B10* as delivery organisations/support providers/or partners depending on their role and whether or not they also have the legal power to award degrees.

When providers fall within the scope of a QAA review in England, the reviewers are concerned with the quality of learning opportunities provided and how the provider plays its role in maintaining the academic standards of the relevant degree-awarding body (if offering validated or franchised programmes) or of the relevant awarding organisation in the case of qualifications which are not located on the FHEQ/FQHEIS.

2 I would like clarification of QAA's definition of a 'Flying Faculty' according to *Chapter B10* of the Quality Code.

The glossary provided in Appendix 2 to *Chapter B10* and also the main QAA glossary (www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us/glossary) provide the following definition:

Flying faculty

'(Or 'fly-in, fly-out faculty') An arrangement whereby a programme is delivered in a location away from the main campus (usually in another country) by staff from the degree-awarding body (DAB), who also carry out all assessment. Support for students may be provided by local staff.'

QAA does not require the use of particular terminology, either in the Quality Code or elsewhere. Terminology is a matter for each provider to determine based on what works and is understood within their own arrangements.

It is important to remember that, irrespective of the label applied, all arrangements that involve a UK degree-awarding body working with another organisation to manage and/or deliver higher education fall within the remit of *Chapter B10* of the Quality Code.

3 Where does the burden/responsibility for QA/E lie when a university offers training programmes that prepare a clinician to sit a professional examination?

The university neither conducts the assessment, nor makes the award. We wish to assure ourselves that we are meeting all of our QA/E obligations.

As you are not the awarding body in this instance, and as the arrangement appears to concern CPD provision, this issue is unlikely to fall within the scope of QAA.

If the university is in the role of delivery organisation for another awarding organisation, your responsibility is as specified in any agreement or contract you have signed with the awarding organisation.

If another awarding organisation is not commissioning the training but you are charging students for CPD preparation for an external examination then students would have recourse to the university if the programme failed to meet its expected standards and quality. It would be appropriate therefore to put in place safeguards to ensure the student experience and your own reputation.

If the provision/training is integrated into an overarching programme of study and the award of academic credit is involved, then normal expectations, based on the Code, would apply, and we would recommend that you refer to *Chapter B10* of the Quality Code for further information.

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