

College Higher Education Toolkit:

Engaging with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education

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About the toolkit

This is a PDF guidance document for colleges that subscribe to the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). It has been developed in consultation with further education and sixth form colleges to help staff understand and effectively use the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code). It is designed to help staff align internal quality assurance processes with the Quality Code to support effective quality management.

As colleges continue to expand their portfolio in terms of the type and amount of higher-level qualifications they provide, aspects of quality assurance can become more complex. Quality systems need to be adaptable to the diversity of size and structure, along with the often complex relationships of multiple awarding bodies, franchises and range of qualifications offered. By identifying how the Quality Code can be applied and integrated, the toolkit is intended to be useful for colleges in reviewing and enhancing their own practices.

Historically it has been recognised that for an organisation to develop effectively, quality must be considered across all areas. It is every bit as important for administrators and finance departments as for programme teams.

All providers of UK higher education must meet the 19 Expectations of the Quality Code (set out in full in the [Annex](#)). All areas of higher education provision can be reviewed against an Expectation during internal review, and the outcomes of such reviews are expected to be evidenced appropriately. The toolkit aims to support the beneficial sharing of information about how these Expectations have been addressed by different providers.

The toolkit is designed to be used as:

- a training tool to enhance own practice
- a reference while completing specific tasks
- an opportunity to consider autonomy within the context of your role
- a platform to share sound practice with links to supporting research.

Key features of the content

Throughout the toolkit, we highlight which Chapter or Part of the Quality Code should be consulted in relation to that particular paragraph or section. For example, a disc marked 'B2' refers to *Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education*.

There are a number of 'Have you considered?' sections, suggesting areas to consider in relation to the topic discussed in that section or subsection.

Hyperlinks have been included where appropriate. References in the text refer to the additional resources and further references included, where relevant, in each section. However, due to the dynamic nature of research in higher education provision it is advisable to search independently for recent publications. The toolkit is complemented by a number of other resources available on QAA's website and other relevant sites.

Case studies and features of good practice are highlighted to widen awareness of current practices and what can be learned from them. Owing to the diversity of the UK higher education sector, the examples included should be seen as developmental not prescriptive.

About the Quality Code

The UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code)¹ sets out 19 **Expectations** that all providers of UK higher education reviewed by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) are required to meet. It is owned, maintained and published by QAA and has been developed with the higher education community. Ongoing consultation enables QAA to ensure that the Quality Code continuously represents Expectations on which the higher education sector has agreed.

Its purpose in relation to UK higher education is:

- to safeguard academic standards
- to assure the quality of learning opportunities offered to students
- to promote continuous and systematic improvement
- to ensure that relevant information is publicly available.

The Quality Code applies to all UK higher education, whether provided within the four nations of the UK or delivered internationally. It applies to providers with the power to award their own degrees and to those who deliver higher education on behalf of another degree-awarding body or are otherwise reviewed by QAA. It protects the interests of all UK higher education students regardless of where they are studying or whether they are full-time, part-time, undergraduate or postgraduate students.

Individual higher education providers use the Quality Code to ensure students have a high quality educational experience.

Structure

The Quality Code consists of a General Introduction and a series of separate Chapters grouped in three Parts. The three parts are interrelated and are mirrored in the themes of the external reviews carried out by QAA.

Part A addresses the setting and maintenance of academic standards. Chapters in Part B set out in detail the processes through which all higher education providers engage in order to set, deliver and maintain academic standards and enhance the quality of learning opportunities. Part C is concerned with the quality of information produced by higher education providers in terms of whether it is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

A Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards

This Part comprises three Chapters:

- *Chapter A1: UK and European Reference Points for Academic Standards*
- *Chapter A2: Degree-Awarding Bodies' Reference Points for Academic Standards*
- *Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards*

Within these Chapters there are seven Expectations, which can be found in the [Annex](#).

¹ The UK Quality Code for Higher Education can be found at www.qaa.ac.uk/qualitycode.

Chapter A1 formally incorporates, and places in an explanatory context, the following QAA publications as constituent components of this Part of the Quality Code:

- **the Qualifications Frameworks** (the UK national frameworks for higher education qualifications): *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and *The Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland* (FQHEIS), which set out the different qualification levels and national expectations of standards of achievement
- **the credit framework for England:** the *Higher Education Credit Framework for England: Guidance on Academic Credit Arrangements in Higher Education in England*
- **the Subject Benchmark Statements** which set out the nature and characteristics of degrees (generally bachelor's with honours) and the outcomes graduates are expected to achieve in specific subject areas
- **guidance on qualification characteristics**
- **the Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark.**

B Part B: Assuring and Enhancing Academic Quality

This Part is divided into 11 Chapters, as follows.

Chapter B1: Programme Design, Development and Approval

Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education

Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching

Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement

Chapter B5: Student Engagement

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

Chapter B7: External Examining

Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review

Chapter B9: Academic Appeals and Student Complaints

Chapter B10: Managing Higher Education Provision with Others

Chapter B11: Research Degrees

Part B follows the student journey. It is concerned with how well the learning opportunities made available to students enable them to achieve their award. *Chapters B1–B9* apply to all providers; *Chapters B10 and B11* apply in particular circumstances. Each Chapter contains a single Expectation, all of which can be found in the [Annex](#).

C Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

Public confidence in higher education relies on public understanding of the achievement represented by higher education qualifications. This Part of the Quality Code sets out an Expectation that higher education providers make available valid, reliable, useful and accessible information about their provision.

Key features

Chapter introductions

Introductory sections define the context, and set out the rationale, for the Expectations. Their text can be used as an aid to interpreting and fulfilling the Expectations.

Expectations

Each Chapter of the Quality Code contains at least one mandatory Expectation. The Expectation expresses the key principle that the higher education community has identified as essential for the assurance of academic standards and quality.

Expectations make clear what UK higher education providers are required to do, what they expect of themselves and each other, and what students and the general public can therefore expect of them.

Individual providers are required to demonstrate they are meeting the Expectations effectively, through their own management and organisational processes, taking account of organisational needs, traditions, culture and decision making. The Expectations are the mandatory element of the Quality Code against which individual providers are judged through external reviews carried out by QAA.

Indicators of sound practice

The Expectation in each Chapter is accompanied by a series of Indicators that reflect sound practice, and through which providers may demonstrate that they are meeting the relevant Expectation. They are broad statements of principle and are not mandatory or prescriptive, but exemplify the sorts of actions that a provider might take, thereby demonstrating that they meet the Expectation. Only parts B and C contain Indicators.

Explanatory notes

Indicators of sound practice are supported by explanatory notes that give more detail, together with examples of how the Indicator may be interpreted in practice. The application of any examples given will depend on the circumstances of a particular provider.

The explanatory notes also provide signposts to other resources including relevant legal and regulatory requirements (these are factual and therefore updated as accuracy of that information requires), which contain further information about how the Expectations may be met. They link together various sources of useful information without duplicating work already done, including extensive referencing to work undertaken by other bodies such as the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and the National Union of Students (NUS).

Overarching values

The overarching values of the Quality Code describe the characteristics that UK higher education providers are expected to demonstrate.

- Every student is treated fairly and with dignity, courtesy and respect.
- Every student has the opportunity to contribute to the shaping of their learning experience.
- Every student is properly and actively informed at appropriate times of matters relevant to their programmes of study.
- All policies and processes relating to study and programmes are clear and transparent.
- Strategic oversight of academic standards and academic quality is at the highest level of academic governance of the provider.
- All policies and processes are regularly and effectively monitored, reviewed and improved.
- Sufficient and appropriate external involvement exists for the maintenance of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities.
- All staff are supported, enabling them in turn to support students' learning experiences.

Overarching themes

Each Part and Chapter of the Quality Code considers and addresses the following overarching themes, as appropriate to the topic in the Chapter.

- How is information about the topic communicated to students and other relevant audiences?
- How can the employability of students be addressed in relation to the topic?
- How are equality and diversity issues embedded throughout?
- How does the topic consider the needs of a diverse student body?
- How do the responsibilities of degree-awarding bodies and other higher education providers differ in relation to the topic?
- How might matters relating to the topic differ in the four nations of the UK?
- How does the content of the Chapter align with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*² and other European and international higher education reference points, as appropriate?
- How do good practice and enhancement relate to the topic, including reference to relevant publications such as Enhancement Themes and Outcomes papers, and work by the Higher Education Academy?

What does the Quality Code do?

The Quality Code gives all higher education providers, including further education colleges delivering higher education programmes, a shared starting point for setting, describing and maintaining the academic standards of their higher education programmes and qualifications and for assuring the quality of the learning opportunities they provide for students. This makes it possible to ensure that higher education provision and outcomes are comparable and consistent at a threshold level across the UK.

In discharging their responsibilities for setting and maintaining the academic standards of their programmes and the quality of the learning opportunities they offer to students, all higher education providers are required to meet the Expectations of the Quality Code.

Higher education providers use the Quality Code as a tool to help them maintain the academic standards of programmes and awards, assure and enhance the quality of learning opportunities and to provide information about their higher education provision. They use it to design their policies and procedures for maintaining academic standards and quality and to bolster their quality assurance mechanisms, from programme design and approval through to monitoring and review.

The Expectations of the Quality Code apply where a student is following a programme of study which ultimately leads to a qualification or the award of academic credit at levels 4–8 of the FHEQ or levels 7–12 of the FQHEIS (see page 4).

This includes integrated foundation year programmes which are designed to enable entry to a specified degree programme or programmes on successful completion. In these cases, it may be necessary to use other external reference points in addition to the Quality Code to set academic standards for the foundation element. If the foundation provision is free-standing, and does not have a direct relationship with a specified higher education programme, it is not covered by the Quality Code, but may be subject to other regulatory requirements.

² *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*: www.enqa.eu/index.php/home/esg

While providers differ considerably all must meet the Expectations of the Quality Code. QAA regularly conducts reviews of UK higher education providers to ensure that this is the case. The review method Higher Education Review (HER) has the flexibility to adapt to differences between providers while at the same time enabling it to check that providers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland fully meet their responsibilities for standards and quality as set out in the Quality Code. In Scotland, Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) is the review method for universities and other higher education institutions. HER offers higher education providers the opportunity to demonstrate how they are meeting nationally agreed Expectations, while ELIR calls on providers to make use of UK-wide reference points by aligning their policies and processes to the Quality Code. With routine representation of students on review teams and their engagement in the quality assurance process, the methods support continuous improvement on quality and standards as part of everyday provider life.

Who is the Quality Code for?

Specialist staff with responsibility for academic standards and quality

The Quality Code provides technical guidance for staff with responsibility for the setting and maintenance of academic standards, quality assurance, and quality enhancement. It is designed as a specialist tool (reference point) for those managing higher education provision. Its contents will often inform individual providers' policies and processes.

The wider community of higher education staff

Academic and professional staff in faculties and departments are familiar with the policies that the Quality Code informs, and any parts of the Quality Code that are relevant to their own responsibilities. While in the wider higher education community staff do not necessarily need to be aware of the detail of the whole Quality Code, it is expected that they would make use of it when carrying out particular activities, such as designing new programmes or determining the nature of support for student learning. Most relevant are *Chapters B1: Programme Design, Development and Approval* and *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*.

Student representatives

Student representatives, including officers of student representative bodies (such as a students' union), will find the Quality Code useful in their discussions with their higher education provider, as it sets out the expectations for the quality of learning opportunities that the provider makes available to its students.

Students and the wider public

The Quality Code provides an important basis for comparability and consistency in provision and outcomes at a threshold level across the UK higher education sector. In this way it provides safeguards for students, the whole UK higher education sector and the general public.

QAA reviewers

Reviewers carrying out the external reviews of higher education providers coordinated by QAA use the Quality Code as a reference point for judging whether an individual provider is meeting the nationally agreed Expectations.

How do we define standards and quality?

Threshold academic standards are the minimum acceptable level of achievement that a student has to demonstrate to be eligible for the award of academic credit or a qualification. For equivalent qualifications, the threshold level of achievement is agreed across the UK and is described by the qualification descriptors set out in the [Qualifications Frameworks](#)³ (see also page 4).

Academic standards are the standards that individual degree-awarding bodies set and maintain for the award of their academic credit or qualifications. These may exceed the threshold academic standards. They include the standards of performance that a student needs to demonstrate to achieve a particular classification of a qualification, such as a first-class honours degree classification in a certain subject or the award of merit or distinction in a master's degree.

Academic quality is concerned with how, and how well, the higher education provider supports students to enable them to achieve their award. It covers learning, teaching and assessment, and all the different resources and processes a provider puts in place to help students progress and fulfil their potential.

Quality assurance is the process for checking that the academic standards and quality of higher education provision meet agreed expectations.



Additional resources and further references

The UK Quality Code for Higher Education: www.qaa.ac.uk/qualitycode

What is the UK Quality Code for Higher Education:
www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/films/film?PubID=206

³ *The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies:*
www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication/?PubID=2843

Regulation

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In England, the government, specifically the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), sets the regulatory framework within which higher education providers operate, with advice from public bodies such as the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). They do this to safeguard the interests of students and ensure effective use of public funds.

A number of bodies are involved in this regulatory framework, and they have specific responsibilities in relation to:

- academic standards and quality
- financial sustainability and good governance
- access and participation
- information provision
- student complaints and redress.

The main organisations responsible for ensuring academic standards and quality in England are HEFCE, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), and the professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs).

In Northern Ireland the Department for Employment and Learning (DELNI) has a statutory duty to make provision for the assessment of the quality of the provision that it funds. It carries out this duty, in conjunction with other higher education funding bodies, by engaging QAA to devise and apply quality assurance methods, in cooperation with the sector. This means that QAA are responsible for reviewing the quality of all publicly funded higher education provision in Northern Ireland on behalf of the Department in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and Further Education Colleges.

In Wales higher education is a 'devolved area' which means that most decisions that are made about higher education are taken by the Welsh Government which provides the context for developing higher education through, for example, setting up the student fees and finance framework, and devising strategies for higher education. The main organisations responsible for ensuring academic quality and enhancement in Wales are the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), which distributes funds received from the Welsh Government to universities and colleges providing higher education courses, Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales (Estyn) and QAA.

In Scotland, the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council (SFC) is the strategic body that is responsible for funding teaching and learning provision, research and other activities in Scotland's colleges and universities. The SFC has a Service Level Agreement with QAA to carry out independent, external reviews of institutional systems for quality assurance and enhancement. The SFC also contracts with Education Scotland to undertake independent reviews of provision in Scotland's colleges on their behalf.

Who checks on quality and enhancement in England?

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)

HEFCE has a statutory duty under the *Further and Higher Education Act 1992* to ensure the assessment of the quality of the provision that it funds. This is underlined in the framework document between BIS and HEFCE, which sets out the guidelines in which HEFCE operates. HEFCE undertakes much quality assurance itself. It also has a contract with QAA to conduct reviews of quality and standards in higher education institutions that it funds.

If a HEFCE-funded institution receives a 'does not meet UK expectations' judgment in a QAA Higher Education Review, and fails to improve through the QAA follow-up process, [HEFCE's policy for addressing unsatisfactory quality in institutions](#)⁴ then comes into force.

HEFCE also manages the [Research Excellence Framework](#)⁵ (REF), which assesses the quality of research in UK higher education institutions.

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA)

QAA carries out reviews to provide public assurance on academic standards and quality at UK higher education providers. Quality assurance reviews build on providers' own internal and external quality assurance arrangements. Full details can be found on our website.⁶

QAA also responds to concerns that have been raised about systemic issues relating to academic standards and quality in UK higher education.⁷

The Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED)

Ofsted assures teaching quality for initial teacher training courses leading to the award of Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) on behalf of the National Council for Teaching and Learning. The output of this quality review is used to determine the distribution of initial teacher training places across institutions.

Professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs)

PSRBs regulate professional and occupational standards and issue their own licences for professional practice. Higher education providers are subject to specific requirements within courses leading to professional qualifications, accredited by these bodies, which sometimes set the curriculum.



Additional resources and further references

Higher Education Funding Council for England: www.hefce.ac.uk

Department for Employment and Learning: www.delni.gov.uk

Higher Education Funding Council for Wales: www.hefcw.ac.uk

Scottish Funding Council: www.sfc.ac.uk

4 HEFCE's policy for addressing unsatisfactory quality in institutions: www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2013/201330/

5 Research Excellence Framework: www.ref.ac.uk

6 QAA review processes: www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education

7 QAA Concerns Scheme: www.qaa.ac.uk/concerns

The operating framework for higher education

| Institution type | Aspect reviewed | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|--|--|
| | Academic quality and enhancement | Financial sustainability including governance and ownership | Access and participation | Dispute resolution | Information provision |
| Degree-awarding bodies not HEFCE-funded | No requirements under regulatory framework | | | | No requirements under regulatory framework |
| HEFCE-funded degree-awarding bodies | Higher Education Review by QAA | HEFCE annual accountability process | OFFA access agreements if fees above £6,000 a year | Membership OIA required | HESES NSS data KIS data HESA data |
| HEFCE-funded further education colleges | | Monitoring by Skills Funding Agency | | No requirements under regulatory framework | HEIFES ILR data NSS data KIS data DLHE |
| Providers with specific course designation | Review for Specific Course Designation by QAA | Annual monitoring by HEFCE on behalf of BIS | No requirement under regulatory framework | Complaints process required | HEAPES HESA AP data |
| Providers with renewable degree awarding powers (DAP) and without HEFCE funding | DAP reviewed by QAA every six years | No requirements under regulatory framework | | | |
| Initial teacher training providers | OFSTED | National Centre for Teaching and Learning (NCTL) | Providers may not charge in excess of £9,000 per year | No requirements under regulatory framework | NCTL returns |
| Providers without direct public funding or degree awarding powers | No requirements under regulatory framework | | | | |

DLHE: Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education survey

HEAPES: Higher Education at Alternative Providers Early Statistics survey

HEIFES: Higher Education in Further Education: Students survey

HESA: Higher Education Statistics Agency

HESA AP: Higher Education Statistics Agency Alternative Provider

HESES: Higher Education Students Early Statistics survey

ILR: Individualised Learner Record

KIS: Key Information Set

NSS: National Student Survey

OFFA: Office for Fair Access

OIA: Office of the Independent Adjudicator

Adapted from www.hefce.ac.uk/reg/of/operaterfhe

Governance and management

The background is a solid teal color. In the lower half, there are several overlapping, semi-transparent geometric shapes in various shades of teal, creating a layered, abstract effect. The shapes are primarily triangles and quadrilaterals, some pointing upwards and some downwards, creating a sense of depth and movement.

Colleges publish information that describes their mission, values and overall strategy. A college's higher education strategy document sets out a clear rationale for its higher education provision and explains how it is related to other provision locally or regionally. It details how it manages its relationships with its partners and other higher education providers; how it builds on the strengths of its further education (FE) provision; and how it addresses staff development and scholarly activity, management and resourcing, curriculum development and relationships with employers.

Necessary structures

A2

Are there specific structures necessary to run higher education in further education colleges?

Colleges determine their approach to the shape and structure of their higher education provision according to, among other factors, the size and the proportion of provision at the higher level, historical background, tradition, strategic aims and objectives. These factors influence the extent to which higher education is separated from further education provision or integrated within it. In terms of quality assurance and liaison with awarding bodies, colleges typically separate arrangements for the management of higher education courses.

Colleges may also have some higher education strategies separate from those for their further education provision. Where this is not the case, they ensure that current policies address the specific needs of higher education students. Colleges may also make efforts to provide distinctive accommodation for teaching, and social spaces dedicated to their higher education students.

C

What does the Quality Code say about this? How does it help in developing efficient structures while avoiding duplication?

Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision stresses that information produced by higher education providers should be clear, timely, current and transparent, and that it should focus on the needs of the intended audience. It should also be available and retrievable where intended users can reasonably expect to find it. Therefore, colleges should consider whether policies (for example, in relation to admissions, complaints/appeals and assessment) located so as to be accessible to higher education students. Separate policies and procedures for further and higher education students are not necessarily required, but the documents should distinguish between these separate groups and address the specific needs of higher education students.

Necessary management information

B8

Does the Quality Code help in identifying management information that needs to be collected for purposes of quality assurance and enhancement?

To systematically review and enhance the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices, colleges collect and analyse information including:

- feedback from students on their learning experience, collected through internal mechanisms
- feedback from students through external instruments like the National Student Survey (NSS)
- routine evaluations of modules and programmes incorporating feedback from staff and external examiners
- feedback from alumni and employers, and placement providers' retention statistics
- mark profiles for students, modules and programmes
- availability and quality of teaching and learning spaces for formal and informal learning, and usage of any virtual learning environment (VLE) and assistive technology
- student academic appeals and complaints
- feedback from external reviews and accreditations, such as those of PSRBs.

The Quality Code makes frequent reference to the collection and analysis of management information that can be used for quality assurance and enhancement.

Use of admissions data

B2

When considering recruitment, selection and admissions policies and procedures colleges regularly review their materials and processes to ensure they remain fit for purpose; that they do not unduly discriminate against any potential applicant groups; and that any supporting information, advice and guidance required to complete a suitable application is reasonably accessible. To facilitate this, data is collected and analysed wherever possible. Analysis of data and statistics on applications, offers and acceptances, as well as on retention rates, withdrawal and transfer, and reasons for non-completion, can be accompanied by reflection on how internal and external developments have impacted upon admissions processes and on feedback received from staff throughout the admissions cycle.

Student engagement and feedback

B4

Data including feedback from students and other stakeholders such as employers, academic and professional services staff and external organisations (including PSRBs where relevant) are used to inform how provision to enable student development and achievement is enhanced. Colleges also consider how such data illustrate the effectiveness of their provision for different cohorts within a diverse student body, such as those cohorts with protected characteristics. Colleges gather feedback from current and former students to inform the professional development they offer to staff with responsibilities for various stages and aspects of the student experience including recruitment and admissions, administration and specialist professional services.

B5

Colleges have in place processes that enable systematic monitoring and evaluation of how well they engage students in quality assurance and enhancement. Collecting relevant management information enables them to demonstrate where student engagement has led to the enhancement of the educational experience.

Progression arrangements

- B6** Colleges (with their degree-awarding bodies where applicable) evaluate their assessment policies, regulations and processes to ensure that they remain equitable, valid and reliable. Management information enables student achievement and academic standards to be monitored over time. This monitoring may encompass the relationship between student entry qualifications and assessment outcomes and may involve considering feedback from sources such as external surveys on student perceptions.
- C** To help prospective students make informed choices about where, what, when and how they will study, colleges give students indicative information about how well a programme is performing. This may include information about graduate destinations, including employment and further study, and about how satisfied students are with the programme.

Use of external examining

- B7** External examining is an integral and essential part of college quality assurance. Colleges draw on feedback from external examiners. An overview report may be produced for consideration by the relevant quality assurance committee(s) and at senior management level. Themes and recurring recommendations can be identified and decisions made about consequent actions to enhance provision.

Internal monitoring and review

- B8** The processes of monitoring and programme review evaluate the standards of student attainment. These processes provide opportunities to ensure the student voice has been heard and to respond to feedback from students and other stakeholders such as employers. Monitoring and review may draw on information from many different areas, including academic departments and professional services.

Colleges draw upon qualitative and quantitative information in programme monitoring and review. This may include data on student progression and achievement, information made publicly available or reported to external bodies (including PSRBs), reports from external examiners, and other comparative data. Feedback from students, alumni, staff and employers also informs the processes. Where possible, data are disaggregated by protected characteristic in order to identify any differential impact on particular groups of students. Analysis of the data enables colleges to identify areas for development as well as highlighting good practice.

Complaints and appeals procedures

- B9** Oversight of the implementation of appeals and complaints procedures is maintained by an appropriate senior body which receives reports of numbers, types and outcomes of appeals and complaints. Such reports may also include other relevant factors, for example: the level and mode of study of those making appeals and complaints; whether they are international or UK students; or whether they are studying through arrangements with other providers or organisations.

Academic standards

Academic standards are the standards that individual degree-awarding bodies set and maintain for the award of their academic credit or qualifications. Threshold academic standards are the minimum standards required for the award of qualifications at a particular level of the FHEQ or FQHEIS. They are distinct from the standards of performance that a student needs to demonstrate to achieve a particular classification of a qualification (these are set by individual degree-awarding bodies).

A

Degree-awarding bodies are responsible for ensuring that threshold standards are met in their awards by aligning programme learning outcomes with the relevant qualification descriptors in the Qualifications Frameworks. They are also responsible for defining their own academic standards by setting the pass marks and determining classification criteria to differentiate between levels of student achievement above the threshold standard.

The primary focus of Part A is on how threshold academic standards are set and maintained.

Which parts of Part A apply to us as a college?

Degree-awarding bodies (typically universities) are responsible for defining and recording, in a written agreement for each partnership arrangement, the specific functions delegated to a partner organisation (a higher education provider without degree awarding powers, typically a further education college), and the individual and shared roles, responsibilities and obligations of each party. A degree-awarding body's responsibility for the academic standards of all credit and qualifications awarded in its name is never delegated.

Colleges that work with degree-awarding bodies are responsible for delivering modules or programmes of study and maintaining the academic standards of the degree-awarding body. The implementation of certain functions related to academic standards (for example, assessment) may be delegated to colleges, which are then accountable to the degree-awarding body for discharging them appropriately and for operating in accordance with the academic frameworks and regulations approved by that body. In some instances, the degree-awarding body may have approved separate academic frameworks and/or regulations for an individual college. In these circumstances, the college is responsible for contributing to the review of regulations and recommending changes for approval by the degree-awarding body.

We are not a degree-awarding body. Do the Expectations of Part A not apply to us at all?

While Part A appears to be focused entirely on the roles and responsibilities of degree-awarding bodies, it also makes clear the roles that delivery organisations play in fulfilling their responsibilities as set out in their written agreement. Responsibilities may have been delegated to them in relation to, for example, assessment, or around the development and review of degree-awarding bodies' academic frameworks and regulations. They may also have a role in the processes through which standards are set and maintained through programme design, development and approval, and therefore should be engaging appropriately with the Qualifications Frameworks (including qualifications descriptors and characteristics) and Subject Benchmark Statements; with designing assessment activities and/or carrying out moderation; and with managing the detection of plagiarism and the associated penalties.

How the Part A Expectations apply

A1

Expectation A1

Application: Programmes must be aligned with the Qualifications Frameworks, credit frameworks and Subject Benchmark Statements.⁸

This responsibility for setting academic standards is not to be delegated by the degree-awarding body. However, colleges involved in curriculum design need to: work with the relevant national credit frameworks, positioning qualifications at the appropriate level; ensure that programme learning outcomes align with relevant qualification descriptors; name qualifications in accordance with titling conventions; ensure learning outcomes reflect the level of the award; and ensure that Subject Benchmark Statements and, if relevant, the *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark* inform programmes.

Where colleges work with a multiple awarding bodies, they adhere to the requirements of each.

Providers not involved in curriculum design demonstrate an awareness of how the programmes they deliver are aligned to the relevant frameworks and are informed by the qualification descriptors and Subject Benchmark Statements.

A2

Expectation A2.1

Application: Academic governance arrangements take account of degree-awarding bodies' academic frameworks and regulations.

Colleges articulate clearly the academic governance arrangements in place for the management of their higher education provision. Governance structures are supported by clear processes for managing the delegated responsibilities for academic standards set out in partnership agreements. Where colleges have their own academic frameworks, regulations and processes in place, they align with those of their awarding bodies.

Where colleges work with more than one degree-awarding body, they have a clear overview of academic and assessment regulations, and staff understand the different requirements of each awarding body.

Colleges involved in curriculum design demonstrate how they have worked within the degree-awarding bodies' and/or other awarding organisations' academic frameworks in designing programmes. Colleges not involved in curriculum design should demonstrate an awareness of the academic frameworks and regulations that govern the awards they deliver.

Colleges adhere to the assessment processes laid down by their awarding bodies. Where they have delegated responsibilities - for example for setting and marking assessments and for internal moderation - processes and procedures are set out according to partnership agreements.

Colleges review the effectiveness of arrangements through annual review and monitoring. They make use of external examiners' reports for confirmation that programmes are assessed fairly and consistently in line with awarding bodies' regulations, policies and procedures.

Expectation A2.2

Application: Colleges keep a definitive record for each programme.

Individual degree-awarding bodies are responsible for ensuring that there is an unambiguous understanding about the nature of any taught or research programme that they have formally approved for delivery through a partner organisation.

⁸ Subject Benchmark Statements, in Part A of the Quality Code:
www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/subject-benchmark-statements

This is articulated in a definitive record which is then used as the reference point for the delivery of the programme by teaching staff/research supervisors, for its assessment by internal and external examiners, and in subsequent monitoring and review.

The definitive record is also used as the basis of the record of study and, in accordance with Indicator 4 of Part C, which enables information on the programme of study to be made available to students at the start of their programme and throughout their studies.

Colleges produce documentation that includes definitive information on the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievements for each programme of study. This is made available to students through, for example, programme specifications and course handbooks available on the VLE. There should be a definitive record of each programme and qualification (including Higher Nationals), which is kept up to date.

A3

Expectation A3.1

Application: Programme approval tests that standards are set at the appropriate level.

Colleges that participate in programme design and approval should demonstrate a thorough understanding of the degree-awarding bodies' processes and how these are used to test that academic standards are set at the appropriate level. They should demonstrate how they have ensured that learning outcomes are aligned with the relevant descriptors.

Colleges have validation and re-validation processes and procedures (including for Higher National programmes).

The *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark* and Subject Benchmark Statements are used by colleges when planning new programmes. Appropriate documentation shows how modules for each programme are mapped to the learning outcomes.

Colleges that do not participate in programme approval demonstrate an awareness of how the degree-awarding body's approval processes test that academic standards are set at the appropriate level.

Expectation A3.2

Application: Assessment tests whether academic standards have been achieved.

Colleges fulfil their delegated responsibilities for assessment in accordance with the degree-awarding body's academic regulations and assessment procedures. They have an assessment framework in place that enables the achievement of learning outcomes to be appropriately demonstrated.

Where Colleges have their own assessment regulations and internal verification processes these align with the procedures of their degree-awarding partners. Regulations, policies and guidance for assessment are transparent, comprehensive, and clear to students and external examiners. They make suitable reference to reasonable adjustments where required for students with protected characteristics and provide helpful guidance on inclusive assessment strategies for staff.

Expectation A3.3

Application: Programme monitoring and review address whether academic standards are being maintained.

Colleges fulfil their delegated responsibilities for programme monitoring and review in accordance with the degree-awarding body's academic regulations and procedures. Monitoring ensures that programmes are delivered in accordance with what was approved (using the definitive record of the programme as the reference point). Monitoring and review are used to ensure that academic currency is subsequently maintained and that programmes continue to meet the UK threshold standards and the degree-awarding bodies' own academic standards.

Colleges have a clear framework for the monitoring and review of programmes that feeds into annual overview reports as part of a higher education quality cycle. Colleges take responsibility for periodic reviews of their Higher National awards.

Expectation A3.4

Application: External and independent expertise is used at key stages of setting and maintaining academic standards.

Colleges demonstrate an awareness of how independent external expertise is used to set academic standards, and fulfil their delegated responsibilities for ensuring external examiners are enabled to carry out their role effectively.

Colleges use external academic and industry expertise in programme development, validation and review. Collaboration in the design and running of programmes together with provision of work placements are long-standing features of employer support for college-based higher education.

Colleges and their degree-awarding bodies make use of the external examiner system to demonstrate independent and external scrutiny of the maintenance of threshold academic standards. External examiners or external verifiers are appointed to each programme and confirm that the standards set at validation are appropriate and being maintained and are comparable with similar programmes of other higher education providers.

External examiners report explicitly on the setting and maintenance of UK threshold academic standards to assist colleges in maintaining standards according to the requirements of their awarding bodies. External examiners' reports are used in annual monitoring, and in discussion at deliberative committee meetings as well as at programme-level meetings.



Feature of good practice

The management and use of long-term strategic relationships with external stakeholders to enhance the student experience

Reaseheath College

Employers and external advisers make a significant contribution to the approval and ongoing currency of the programmes of study. External industry professionals play a key role in maintaining the vocational relevance and currency of programmes in often fast-moving industries. External stakeholders provide work experience opportunities and support with final-year students' major projects. The College selects carefully its external advisers and encourages them to provide advice as critical friends, maintaining a continuing relationship with them through a range of stakeholder and other events.



Have you considered?

Which degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding bodies you are working with

Which modules or programmes of study you are delivering for each of these

Your understanding of the responsibilities you have been allocated by each awarding body/awarding organisation for helping to set and/or maintain the academic standards of their awards

Your understanding of the responsibilities of the degree-awarding body and/or other awarding organisation in setting and maintaining academic standards

Which internal and external reference points are relevant to setting and maintaining the academic standards of the provision you are delivering, and what use you make of these reference points

The ways in which you are involved in recruitment, selection and admissions of students; in programme design, development and approval; in assessment of students; in engaging with external experts including external examiners; and in programme monitoring and review, and how these activities contribute to helping to set and maintain academic standards

How you ensure that your staff understand and carry out their responsibilities for helping to set and/or maintain academic standards

How you engage with the academic framework and regulations of each awarding body and/or other awarding organisation? And (if you are working with multiple bodies and/or if you have a regulatory framework of your own) how you manage differences in what is required

The arrangements in place for you to report back to the awarding bodies/awarding organisation on how effectively you have carried out your responsibilities

How well these arrangements are working at your end

What gives you confidence in the academic standards of the provision you deliver

Quality of learning opportunities

The background of the slide is a solid dark green color. In the lower half, there are several overlapping, semi-transparent geometric shapes in various shades of green, creating a layered, abstract effect that resembles a landscape or a series of overlapping planes.

Quality or academic quality is a way of describing how well the learning opportunities available to students help them to achieve their qualification. Quality is about making sure that appropriate and effective teaching, support, assessment and learning resources are provided for students.

B

Quality can be assured (checks are made that it meets UK expectations), and it can be enhanced (further improvements are made). Higher education providers demonstrate a commitment to providing a high quality learning experience. Input from students, who can make a direct contribution through providing feedback, advice and suggestions, is a key feature of quality enhancement and assurance processes. Robust information systematically generated by students, external examiners and others as part of routine quality assurance procedures can be considered at provider level as part of the oversight of higher education.

The quality and commitment of staff is critical to maintaining and enhancing the high quality of learning and teaching. Higher education providers recognise that all staff, both academic and support, continuously reflect upon, and seek to improve, their practice to advance learning and teaching and the quality of the student experience.

Higher education providers commit to reviewing activities systematically to see whether they can identify features of current practice that can be improved (see, [Enhancement of learning opportunities](#)). It does not mean that quality is not presently high, or that what is provided for students must be subject to constant change.

What are the relevant Expectations?

The relevant Expectations are those in the 11 Chapters of **Part B** of the Quality Code. These are set out in the [Annex](#). Detailed notes on how to address them can be found in subsequent themed sections of this guidance:

[Creating a higher education ethos](#)

[Student engagement](#)

[Supporting higher education students](#)

[Assessment](#)

[Monitoring and review](#)

[Higher Education Review](#)

How does Part B relate to Part A?

Part A addresses the setting and maintenance of academic standards. Chapters in Part B set out in detail the processes in which all higher education providers engage, in order to set, deliver and maintain academic standards and enhance the quality of learning opportunities.

Enhancement of learning opportunities

Enhancement is defined as the process by which higher education providers systematically improve the quality of provision and the ways in which students' learning is supported (*General Introduction*).

This can take place in different ways and at different levels, but a higher education provider needs to be aware that it has a responsibility to improve the quality of learning opportunities and to have policies, structures and processes in place to detect where improvement is necessary. Willingness to consider enhancement is embedded throughout the higher education provider, but stems from a high-level awareness of the need to consider improvement. Quality enhancement naturally forms part of effective quality assurance, and consequently guidance on possible approaches to enhancement is embedded throughout the Quality Code. Specific definitions of enhancement exist for the purposes of QAA's review methods.

What definition of enhancement is used for review purposes?

Enhancement is defined by QAA for the purposes of review in England, Wales and Northern Ireland as: 'taking deliberate steps at provider level to improve the quality of learning opportunities' which appropriately summarises the Quality Code definition set out above.⁹

This definition suggests a particular approach which links strategy and initiative. Colleges should be able to demonstrate a strategic approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities (through systematic planning at college level) and an ethos that expects and encourages it, providing opportunities to identify, support and disseminate good practice. Thus, enhancement involves an integrated approach rather than being just a collection of examples of good practice.

A strategic approach necessitates systems that enable relevant management information to be collected. This informs the college's deliberative structures and strategic enhancement initiatives and work streams in relation to, for example, curriculum design, student retention, scholarly activity, learning and teaching, developing a higher education ethos, and the use of VLEs.

Effective communication channels inform staff of the enhancement priorities. Actions taken as a result of the initiatives can be measured, monitored and evaluated for effectiveness in terms of student satisfaction or improvements in the quality of learning opportunities and any resulting good practice shared.

Such an approach includes mechanisms for obtaining robust information from students, external examiners and other relevant parties. Gathering such information does not presuppose any deficit in quality; rather, the collection of useful feedback forms part of effective routine quality assurance procedures.

Feedback is systematically considered at management level as part of the oversight of higher education quality. Good practice and opportunities for further improvement are thus identified and inform new strategic initiatives that have a positive impact on the quality of learning opportunities.

⁹ *Higher Education Review: A Handbook for Providers:*
www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2672



These processes work most effectively when sound measures are in place to obtain feedback from students and other relevant parties.

In brief, the key features of effective quality enhancement are:

- effective strategic oversight of higher education at provider level to provide a framework for actions, consider information and inform new initiatives
- dynamic learning and teaching practice to incorporate enhancement initiatives
- comprehensive and accurate evaluation procedures
- systematic monitoring of the process to ensure continued fitness for purpose.

Case study

Reaseheath College

Reaseheath College introduced its new VLE in the academic year 2012-13. In the first year of cross-college deployment, it was well adopted without any pressure on staff to achieve specific targets. The system was seen as intuitive and staff were generally enthusiastic about receiving training. A student and staff Resources User Group was established to feed back on the VLE and guide its early development.

The College put in place a threshold quality standard as an aid to assuring and enhancing the quality of the virtual learning experiences of students on all programmes including blended learning programmes.

The VLE threshold quality standard aims to ensure that:

- student expectations about how the VLE should support their learning are addressed
- support provided for student learning is consistent across the College



- academic and administrative staff receive clear guidance on providing resources and information through the VLE
- the VLE provides a platform on which to develop more ambitious e-learning activities across the College.

The VLE criteria were devised to set a minimum expectation for online provision to ensure that all learners on full-time courses had comprehensive online resources to complement their course. The standards incentivise the provision of exemplary dynamic course materials and e-learning resources. Course teams observe, and are encouraged to exceed, the minimum requirement as they integrate blended learning into their practice.

The standards are graded into three categories: Bronze (Information); Silver (Interaction) and Gold (Inspiration). Bronze is the threshold standard for all courses. Yearly targets are set for the achievement of the Silver and Gold standards based on access and usage, resources, activities, and design and organisation.

Students value a clear and easily accessible organising structure to VLE content. However, there is no requirement that module VLE sites are uniform in organisation or conform to a particular template. Teaching arrangements differ from subject to subject and staff are encouraged to make innovative use of the VLE and to decide when materials should be made available to students through the VLE. However, where the cohort includes students with specific learning difficulties, for example dyslexia, requiring prior access to teaching materials, it is usually easiest to make these materials available to the whole cohort via the VLE. Students are provided with clear information on the VLE regarding which teaching materials will be uploaded and at what points in the module's schedule.

The implementation of the threshold standard is monitored through: quality assurance reviews conducted twice a semester to provide an overview of performance for each programme and mapping VLE content against the three grades of Bronze, Silver and Gold; module level data drawn from the College's core module evaluation surveys; and student reports generated through the module site. The data is made available for review at the Higher Education Curriculum Group and departmental Course Committee Meetings each semester, with an overview report being generated for Higher Education Academic Board annually.

Where is enhancement in the Quality Code?

There is no separate Chapter on enhancement because it is addressed throughout the Quality Code. Particular reference is made to it in the following Chapters and Indicators.

Chapter B3, Indicator 5

Higher education providers collect and analyse appropriate information to ensure the continued effectiveness of their strategic approach to, and the enhancement of, learning opportunities and teaching practices.

Chapter B4, Indicator 1

Through strategic and operational planning, and quality assurance and enhancement, higher education providers determine and evaluate how they enable student development and achievement.

Chapter B5 Expectation

Higher education providers take deliberate steps to engage all students, individually and collectively, as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience.

Chapter B6, Indicator 18

Degree-awarding bodies systematically evaluate and enhance their assessment policies, regulations and processes.

Chapter B8, Indicator 2

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

Chapter B9, Expectation B9

Higher education providers have procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints about the quality of learning opportunities; these procedures are fair, accessible and timely, and enable enhancement.

Part C, Indicator 7

Higher education providers set out their framework for managing academic standards and quality assurance and enhancement and describe the data and information used to support its implementation

What aspects of provision are covered, and where?

Enhancement is not confined to the above Expectations and Indicators, as colleges are committed to putting in place processes and procedures that enable them to systematically evaluate and improve the quality of provision and the ways in which students' learning is supported. The following subsections provide examples (which are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive).

B1 Programme design, development and approval

Programme design, development and approval depend on reflection and critical self-assessment. Programmes are continually evaluated and revised to improve the learning experience for students.

B2 Recruitment, selection and admission

Colleges regularly review their application materials and processes to ensure they remain fit for purpose, that they do not unduly discriminate against any potential applicant groups and that any supporting information, advice and guidance required to complete a suitable application is reasonably accessible and allows all students to make an informed decision. Colleges who adhere to their awarding bodies' policies and procedures may have little or no involvement in their review or development. However, strong channels of communication should be in place that enable feedback on identified improvements to policies and the dissemination of changes or updates to a policy to all affected staff.

B3 Learning and teaching

Colleges recognise that effective learning and teaching activities and practices that result in inspirational teaching depend on staff who are appropriately qualified for their role and who engage throughout their career in continuing professional development (CPD), in the evaluation of their practice, and in developing their understanding of their subject and the learning processes as it relates to their subject. Opportunities for CPD are planned strategically, and colleges have in place procedures that facilitate the identification and dissemination of good practice.

B4 Enabling student development and achievement

Colleges give thought to and develop an approach that enables every student to fulfil their potential and engage in learning. The thorough evaluation of the effectiveness of the strategies and operation of the provision forms a key part of a college's quality assurance and enhancement cycle.

B5 Student engagement

Effective learning and teaching occur when the partnership between the college, their staff and their students results in the co-production and enhancement of creative and transformational learning. Students are uniquely positioned to comment on how a strategic approach to learning and teaching enables and supports their learning and how enhancement of the opportunities can benefit their learning. Consequently, student involvement in quality can have a positive influence on the delivery and development of any aspect of the student educational experience.

B6 Assessment of students and the recognition of prior learning

As part of their strategic approach to enhancing the quality of their provision and their management of academic standards, degree-awarding bodies, working with students and with delivery organisations where applicable, evaluate their arrangements and identify opportunities for development, making use of management information as appropriate.

B7 External examining

External examiners offer advice on good practice and opportunities to enhance the quality of programmes/modules through annual written reports to a college or its awarding body. Colleges consider these reports carefully and take action in response to recommendations.

B8 Programme monitoring and review

All higher education providers are involved in elements of programme monitoring and review processes because these enable providers to consider how the learning and teaching experience for students may be improved. Programme monitoring and programme review are part of a continuous engagement by staff and students with a programme and lead to enhancement, as colleges reflect on their academic provision and consider how it may be changed to enhance the student learning experience. Good practice can be identified, built upon and shared, providing opportunities for continuous improvement of the programme and the student experience. Processes are designed in such a way as to enable a balance between assurance and enhancement to be achieved.

B9 Academic appeals and complaints

The investigation of appeals and complaints provides an important source of feedback for providers which contributes to the enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities.

B10 Managing higher education with others

An increasing variety of arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with others can enhance the student experience. These can include offering flexible entry routes and modes of study (such as part-time study while working) which may widen access; curricula that offer learning related to contemporary working practices; or new forms of teaching delivery.



Feature of good practice

The proactive and systematic approach of staff across the College to the enhancement of student learning opportunities

Askham Bryan College

The quality assurance and enhancement cycles operate efficiently, with reports and data from programme teams and students being considered at a strategic level by the College's senior committees and actions subsequently taken to address and improve practical and strategic issues. Academic staff show an awareness and understanding of the quality improvement cycle and know how to access policies and information as required, for example on good practice already in existence at the College. Good practice is identified and disseminated by deliberation on findings from external examiners' reports and discussions taking place at different levels, including by section leaders, course teams, and at course managers' meetings. The College has created a Governors' Quality and Standards Committee as another significant body to review quality enhancement arrangements.



Feature of good practice

Strategic direction from the Board of Governors feeds into relevant and flexible programmes that meet the needs of both employers and students

Abingdon and Witney College

Clear strategic direction is provided by the Board of Governors, the Principal and the Senior Management Team. This drives the development and enhancement of relevant and flexible programmes that meet the needs of both employers and students. The Higher Education Strategy and the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy both provide strong direction for the delivery and enhancement of higher education at the College, including a strategic view on staffing and staff development. The College has successfully linked these key strategic imperatives to unite staff at all levels to drive a culture of enhancement that emphasises excellence in learning and teaching. This culture supports students in becoming successful and challenges them to achieve their full potential. Evidence of this commitment is apparent among staff across all levels of the academic and student services teams.



Have you considered?

How you collect information from students and other stakeholders to inform strategic improvements in the quality of students' learning experiences

How you ensure that this information is fit for purpose

How you analyse this information

How you make sure that this analysis happens at an appropriate strategic level

How this analysis lead to initiatives at provider level which further improve the quality of students' learning experiences

How you measure the effectiveness of these initiatives

How you monitor the enhancement procedure

Further questions

Here are some fundamental questions that are asked at programme level in the various processes of college-led reviews.

Where are you are now? Who are your students? What are the characteristics and learning needs of your students? How effective is the current learning experience of your students? Are some groups of students more successful learners than others? Are some groups of students better prepared for post-graduation life than others? What evidence can you draw on? How robust is the evidence? What is the evidence telling you?

Where do you want to be in the future? What are the patterns and mechanisms of supporting learning which the college wishes to develop in order to support student engagement and high quality learning?

How will you get there? How will you strategically manage the enhancement processes that will allow you to meet your aspirations?

How will you know when you get there? What monitoring and evaluation processes do you have in place? How will the outcomes be analysed? How, and to whom, will the outcomes be disseminated?



Additional resources and further references

Application of the Enhancement Expectation:

www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2852

Creating a higher education ethos

To create an ethos that differentiates between higher and further education, colleges put in place facilities and structures, processes and procedures, including scholarly activity and staff development opportunities, that enable students to meet their academic aspirations through self-directed, independent learning.

A common characteristic of college-based higher education is that it is overwhelmingly vocational, and responsive to the needs of employers and students, who benefit from a supportive and intensive teaching style. A range of higher education and higher-level qualifications are taught, mostly at levels below the bachelor's degree, including non-prescribed courses and qualifications. All higher education provision (defined as qualifications at a level 4 or higher in the FHEQ) is validated by degree-awarding bodies.

The majority of higher education study is done on a part-time basis by adults holding a variety of qualifications (including previous higher education awards) and who work and live in the locality or region (Parry et al, 2012). Students undertaking vocational courses are often part-time and in employment. There is thus a need for colleges to foster a study environment flexible enough to support a wide range of circumstances and work patterns, while also promoting a scholarly ethos and a community conducive to effective higher education.



Feature of good practice

The dedicated management and resourcing of higher education which provides effective oversight and a structure for enhancement

Guildford College of Further and Higher Education

Staff confirmed that there is a clear and shared understanding of the strategic approach to higher education, and management mechanisms focus on enhancing higher education. The Head of Higher Education has a significant role in implementing appropriate systems and processes that ensure the distinctive features of higher education provision are maintained and enhanced. Programme self-assessment processes focus on quality assurance and action-focused enhancement. The College has a holistic approach across all higher education programmes taken to improve the quality of students' learning experiences, pulled together in a higher education enhancement action plan.

What is the scope of scholarly activity?

B3

The Quality Code notes that 'Scholarship and research lie at the heart of higher education' (Chapter B3, page 13). However, their nature depends on the academic level of the programme, the subject area and the provider.

Scholarly activity undertaken in a college-based context will not necessarily involve original research, or lead to the production of new knowledge or the publication of academic journals but it does mean more than professional development. Enhancing the research abilities of college staff is likely to have a positive impact on their teaching and helps to develop a higher education ethos among staff and students.



Feature of good practice

The Research Strategy that underpins higher education learning and teaching

Myerscough College

The College's Research Strategy provides a framework to support staff involvement in applied research which in turn has a direct impact on higher education teaching and fosters a higher education ethos among staff and students. Learning and teaching benefit directly from staff engagement in research through staff's ability to impart relevant techniques and the inclusion of current disciplinary thinking and applications.

While there is no agreed definition for scholarly activity in a college-based context, HEFCE (HEFCE, 2009/05 page 165) considers that it is about developing and informing practice through:

- keeping up to date with the subject
- curriculum development, particularly in relation to foundation degrees, often working with degree-awarding bodies
- curriculum development that involves research
- updating information and communications technology (ICT) skills
- taking higher qualifications – master's degrees, doctorates and teaching qualifications
- consultancy to industry and other agencies
- industrial secondments or work shadowing
- involvement with Sector Skills Councils
- research and publications
- applied research
- personal development
- attending staff development events
- attending conferences and workshops externally.

This would involve reading the latest books, and academic and professional journals, but could also include writing, observations and review of other professionals, attendance at relevant conferences, attendance at workshops and seminars, professional networking and specific project work of an academic or specific professional nature. Scholarly activity in the context of college-based higher education includes activity that supports deeper understanding and maintains the latest thinking of the academic community and keeping up to date with professional or vocational applications of the subject.

One important aspect of teachers' scholarly activity in a college-based higher education context is to ensure that their knowledge is current in order to meet the demands of more challenging students (Jones, 2006). Simmons and Lea (2013) point to scholarly activity as having benefits for students' learning opportunities, the quality of teaching and learning, academic standards, the currency of the curriculum, and the currency of staff subject knowledge.



Feature of good practice

The support provided for staff members to complete scholarly activity

Brooksby Melton College

The College has a clear and systematic policy on the application of scholarly activity remission and support. Staff may apply for support in differing categories. For example, to complement documentation produced by the University,¹⁰ one lead practitioner produced a referencing guide to help students. Other examples include a request to develop the first two years of an existing top-up degree and support for a part-time doctorate. Another member of staff is implementing a digital questionnaire to enhance his teaching.



Have you considered?

Whether the college is strategically committed to scholarly activity that enhances the student learning experience

Whether within the higher education provision there is a culture of scholarly activity that clearly supports the enhancement of learning opportunities

What forms of scholarly activity best support the college context, for example a commitment to serve the local community

Partnered approaches to scholarly activity with degree-awarding bodies

How you maintain and develop staff subject currency

How you promote scholarly activity among your higher education teaching staff

How you support staff to undertake scholarly activity, for example through teaching remission

How you approve scholarly activity applications

How you record scholarly activity

What forums are in place to facilitate the dissemination of the outputs of scholarly activity

How you evaluate the impact of scholarly activity on the maintenance of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities

¹⁰ That is, its degree-awarding body.



Additional resources and further references

Higher Education Funding Council for England (2009/05) *Supporting Higher Education in Further Education Colleges*. Policy, Practice and Prospects. Bristol: HEFCE.

Jones, R (2006) *Scholarly Activity in the Context of HE in FE*:

www.adm.heacademy.ac.uk/library/files/topic-links/he-in-fe/scholarly_activity_in_the_context_of_he_in_fe_june_06.pdf

Simmons, J and Lea, J (2013) *Capturing an HE Ethos in College Higher Education Practice*, QAA, Gloucester:

www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2773

Parry, G, Callender, C, Scott, P and Temple, P (2012) *Understanding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges*, BIS Research Paper 69. London: BIS:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/understanding-higher-education-in-further-education-colleges

How do staff continue their professional development?

B3

Colleges assure themselves that everyone involved in teaching or supporting student learning is appropriately qualified, supported and developed. This extends beyond staff involved in teaching on programmes delivered at the college to third parties who deliver individual modules or support students to achieve learning outcomes when on placements or through work-based learning.

B10

While many colleges require staff to possess a qualification higher than the one they are delivering, it is for colleges to determine what is necessary to demonstrate that a member of staff is qualified to fulfil their role in teaching or supporting learning. Many staff will hold or be working towards a relevant formal qualification; however, this is not always the case where staff bring with them industrial experience and expertise or where they have current practitioner knowledge and an understanding of the subject they teach.

Throughout their teaching careers staff are encouraged to engage with opportunities to develop and extend their teaching capabilities and to reflect upon their teaching practice. Colleges offer appropriate induction and mentoring to staff who are new to teaching or to supporting higher education students.

Colleges also encourage staff to undertake professional development activities that specifically address higher education learning and teaching.

Colleges may encourage staff to take initial teaching qualifications and to add further value to their roles by engaging with the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and/or the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF), as well as being open to continuing professional development (CPD) generally. Colleges thereby demonstrate the value they place upon enhancing the skills of all staff who support learning, and on the quality of the learning experiences offered to their students.



Feature of good practice

Academic staff are highly qualified and are actively encouraged and supported to pursue a comprehensive range of continuing professional development activities

Ashton Sixth Form College

A number of academic staff have master's-level qualifications. Those without a postgraduate qualification are working towards one or have extensive subject and professional expertise that enables them to teach at postgraduate level. Funding is available for staff to undertake relevant postgraduate degrees, and two are currently working towards PhDs. Staff are also engaged in a range of scholarly and professional activities which is in the process of being logged to formally record and strategically guide these activities.

Case study

Coleg Sirgar

In response to feedback from staff who were struggling with the demands of delivering higher education in a further education context, while remaining current and up to date in their subject, the College developed a Continuous Professional Development Scheme to specifically develop scholarly activity. The scheme was designed as a means of supporting CPD for those delivering courses up to level 6 on the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (level 6 on the FHEQ).

The Scheme aims to:

- improve teaching and learning
- have a positive impact on higher education learning experiences and curriculum design
- support the College in achieving its mission and strategic aims
- allow staff to explore their research interests within a prescribed framework that ensures relevance for the institution and its learners
- remove barriers in relation to time and/or funding
- support a wide range of staff delivering higher education
- encourage staff to: undertake primary research; engage in partnership working; explore new technologies; organise a conference, showcase or similar event; or pursue other relevant activities in support of their subject.

An important feature of the scheme is that it is not designed to support staff undertaking higher degrees, although the outcomes of supported activity can make a positive contribution towards this. Many staff who have engaged in the scheme had already achieved higher degrees earlier in their career or had previously been supported by the College to achieve one as part of their CPD.

The Scheme has flourished over a five-year period, with over 55 scholarly activity projects having been supported since its inception. In recent years, it has been linked to the College's fee plan. The scheme provides remission for staff of up to three hours per week over a period of 35 weeks to allow them to undertake a scholarly project. In addition, staff are required to devote some non-teaching time to the project. Projects are allocated to curriculum areas proportionately to the number of students.



Activities have enhanced teaching and learning, opportunities for students, and the reputation of staff and that of the College as a whole. In the best examples there has been an impact at an international level.

At the end of the project, all participants have to provide a report on their work in the form of a 500-word evidence-based summary of the project and its purpose; what they have learned; how it has improved the learner experience; next steps; and dissemination. Most importantly, participants are also required to feed back their findings at the annual College HE in FE Teaching and Learning conference held in July. The 500-word summaries form the basis of a College publication to accompany the conference. This event brings together the whole College higher education community spanning all subjects and curriculum areas.

Identifying the CPD needs of higher education staff

B4

In the interests of quality enhancement, colleges support and monitor staff performance through line management, appraisal, monitoring, lesson and peer observation, and review of teaching. Peer observation and review of teaching identify strengths and areas for improvement which feed into the appraisal process, forming the basis of both an individual and a college-wide professional development programme.



Feature of good practice

Effective staff engagement in continuous professional development enhances the quality of teaching and learning and is valued by students

Guildford College of Further and Higher Education

The College has a well-structured and differentiated Continuing Professional Development Policy. Staff teaching on higher education programmes are enabled to keep up to date with their discipline areas and academic and regulatory requirements through College development days and external events. Funding available through the Teaching Quality and Enhancement Fund allows staff to take part in awarding body events and to undertake five days' industry experience annually. Staff are given remission to write and publish papers and to take part in professional conferences. They are supported in gaining and maintaining membership of professional bodies, including the Zoological Society, the Professional Golf Association and the British Horse Society. This enables them to incorporate practice-led materials and case studies into their teaching. Tutors' professional practice is valued by students.



Have you considered?

- How new staff are inducted into higher education
- How you identify and encourage appropriate staff to participate in CPD
- How staff continue to develop their higher education professional identity
- How you continue to develop your institution's higher education culture and ethos
- Offering support for engagement with the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF)
- Encouraging staff to gain Higher Education Academy (HEA) recognition
- Sharing practice through network events involving other colleges or organisations
- Working in partnership with your degree-awarding body to offer professional development opportunities
- Enabling staff to work-shadow a colleague at an degree-awarding body
- Inviting a peer from another provider to be a mentor
- Running events to meet specific needs (assessment, work-based learning)
- Offering lunchtime workshops tailored to the academic calendar
- Offering opportunities for industrial secondments
- Encouraging and supporting staff to become external examiners and/or reviewers
- Developing web-based teaching resources tailored specifically to support the development of higher education teaching practices
- Targeting courses and training towards areas that have been identified for enhancement at your institution, for example assessment, the use of technology
- Involving students in peer observations and review

Case study

A holistic approach to the observation of higher education teaching

Peter Symonds College

The observation process should be such that the observer has an opportunity to identify good practice by the person observed, and that that good practice can be disseminated within the higher education teaching team or beyond. Observation should primarily focus on the delivery of teaching, rather than the content.

The Holistic Observation of Teaching (HOT) process is essential to the development of the higher education teaching team and is a key tool in ensuring enhancement. The observation process will consist of five elements:

| | Action by whom? | Timing | Number of copies to |
|--|---|---|--|
| (Part 1) Tutor preparation Pre-lesson questions Scheme of work Lesson plan | Tutor | Before lesson observation | (1) Observer |
| (Part 2) Observer feedback A lesson observation form | Observer (Higher Education Quality Assistant - HEQA) | Minimum of 45 minutes | (4) Personnel (for inclusion in appraisal) Director of HE HEQA Tutor |
| (Part 3) Written feedback from the students in the lesson observed | Observer (HEQA) or students | Feedback to be discussed during professional discussion | (4) Observer Director of HE HEQA |
| (Part 4) A professional discussion and evaluation of the lesson | Observer (HEQA) and Tutor | Minimum of 30 minutes | (4) Personnel (for inclusion in appraisal) Director of HE HEQA Tutor |
| (Part 5) Completion of self-evaluation form | Tutor | n/a | (3) Personnel (for inclusion in appraisal) Director of HE HEQA |

Combining these elements into HOT is a unique approach; however collectively they combine the three main motivations for observation of teaching put forward by Gosling (2005):

- **evaluation**, allowing judgements to be made on the quality of teaching for internal quality
- **development**, assisting staff to improve their teaching
- **collaboration**, collaborative peer review of teaching - which is about finding ways of creating and sustaining constructive and purposeful conversations about teaching that open problems to public debate and discussion (Gosling, D (2005) Peer Observation of Teaching, SEDA, 118).

The format for the lesson observation, professional discussion and evaluation have been adapted from good practice identified in UK universities. The questions for students have been drawn from discussions with higher education colleagues and issues raised at higher education conferences. This observation process is mapped to the Quality Code.

The professional discussion and evaluation of the lesson is a collaborative process aimed at developing the higher education teaching team. It asks the observer to consider how this process might impact his/her teaching and scholarly activity as well as asking the tutor to reflect on the lesson. The essence of this discussion should be two colleagues

reflecting on the observed lesson; sharing their experience and their ideas about teaching; providing insights into their own scholarly activity; and concluding what both should do developmentally. An observation would normally last one hour and a professional discussion at least half an hour. Professional discussions should take place within a fortnight of the lesson observation.

Members of the higher education teaching team carry out the observations. The aim is that all members of staff teaching higher education observe each other.

Students as independent learners

B3

A key characteristic of UK higher education is the emphasis placed on students' development as independent learners who share responsibility for their learning, its enhancement and the enrichment of their overall experience.

Learning how to think and research independently is a key feature of higher education. Independent learners are motivated to learn and reflect on their own learning. Broadly, independent learning is undertaken outside contact hours, but contributes to programme-specific learning outcomes.

Colleges support students in understanding what it means to be an independent learner by:

- discussing with students their expectations of the course - how they are expecting to be taught and assessed
- discussing students' role in lectures, classes, and online discussion forums
- suggesting the development of learning communities outside scheduled contact time, through reading groups and study groups
- peer tutoring at programme level
- giving clear guidance about what is expected of students week to week, for instance the amount of reading they are expected to do and how to approach it
- using exemplars of previous assignments to discuss standards.



Feature of good practice

The student-centred teaching and learning approaches that support and engage students as independent learners

Carshalton College

The College has, over several years, worked with staff and students to identify the most effective teaching and learning approaches. The current Pedagogy in Higher Education project, building on previous research in the College, aims to develop practice that recognises the diverse learning needs of students studying vocational higher education in a further education environment. The project is being piloted on University of Roehampton validated awards, with the intention of developing and implementing findings on other provision in the future. Students commented positively on the enthusiasm of staff and their ability to make learning interesting and intellectually stimulating. As a result of this, students felt more confident in achieving their learning goals and in tackling unfamiliar problems.



Have you considered?

How you explain the concept of independent learning to students

How you support your students to develop as independent learners

How you support students to develop critical thinking, writing and problem-solving skills

Whether there are sufficient learning resources to support the level of independent learning that is expected?



Additional resources and further references

We have published a suite of four guidance documents for higher education providers, intended to encourage the provision of clear information about higher education learning.

- [*Explaining Staff Teaching Qualifications*](#)
- [*Explaining Class Size*](#)
- [*Explaining Student Workload*](#)
- [*Responding To Feedback From Students*](#)

The guidance is not prescriptive but provides practical advice to all providers when considering how best to make available the information about the learning opportunities they offer and to help inform students about what to expect from their higher education experience.

Each document stands alone, but together the four documents are intended to provide a coherent explanation of the elements that make up a complete learning experience. The need for the mutual engagement of both providers and students to ensure the effectiveness of this experience is emphasised throughout.

To complement this guidance, QAA has produced a set of companion guides for current and prospective students.

- [*Information on Staff Teaching Qualifications*](#)
- [*Information on Class Size*](#)
- [*Information on Workload*](#)
- [*Information on How You Can Comment on Your Course*](#)

All these publications are available at:

www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance

Case study

The transfer of consortium quality assurance practices to other higher-level provision

West Herts College

West Herts College (WHC) is a member of the Hertfordshire Higher Education Consortium (HHEC) and delivers a range of long standing Foundation degree (Fd) programmes on behalf of its awarding body partner, the University of Hertfordshire (UH). These indirectly funded programmes include courses from a range of curriculum areas including Business, Computing and Creative pathways, Sport and Early Years.

Robust quality assurance policies and procedures exist, which effectively facilitate the monitoring and reporting of all aspects of performance of UH validated Fds delivered across the HHEC. More recently, WHC increased its portfolio of directly funded Higher National (HN) programmes. The College took the strategic decision to adopt best practice quality assurance practices used by UH for Fds and apply these to the management and oversight of its HN provision. West Herts College was responsible for leading on this work and collaborated with other HHEC partners to proactively adopt all key relevant handbooks, monitoring forms and student feedback surveys to best match the requirements of Pearson based HN qualifications. The HHEC Quality Handbook, Module Evaluation Forms, Annual Monitoring and Evaluation Reports, Examination Board agendas and all student surveys are examples of UH documentation that were amended to ensure a standardised approach to the monitoring and maintenance of quality standards across WHC based HE programmes.

In addition, arrangements were made for HN students to access UH academic support materials via its virtual learning environment and learning resource centre. Further access to a wide range of social facilities were enabled to mirror the experience of college based Fd students.

These initiatives have assisted WHC in developing a strong college based higher education culture and ethos, where Fd and HN students have similar access rights and experiences to one another. This has led to more effective interaction and engagement with higher education amongst Fd and HN students and has enhanced management and delivery of HN programmes at the College.



Feature of good practice

The development and embedding of a distinctive higher education experience

North West Kent College of Technology

The commitment of staff at all levels of the College to make the experience for higher education students a distinctive one. There is a clear intention to provide the small group of higher education students, within a largely further education environment, the opportunity to be considered as a unique entity with particular needs and aspirations. This is supported by a management structure that allows higher education to have a significant voice. Students spoke positively of the processes for engagement and for having their voice heard and responded to, with evidence that their comments lead to further changes and enhancements.

Student Engagement

This section relates to the participation of students in quality assurance and enhancement processes, including the expression and representation of student views through formal mechanisms.

Student engagement is defined in two distinct ways in the Quality Code (*Chapter B5*, page 2), as ‘improving the motivation of students to engage in learning and to learn independently’ and as ‘the participation of students in quality enhancement and quality assurance processes, resulting in the improvement of their educational experience’. This section uses it in the sense of the latter definition.

B5

What is the scope of student engagement?

The scope of student engagement includes student involvement at any point of the educational journey into which students can offer insight. This encompasses:

- application and admission
- induction and transition into higher education
- programme and curriculum design, delivery and organisation
- curriculum content
- teaching delivery
- learning opportunities
- learning resources
- student support and guidance
- assessment.

B5

How is it demonstrated?

Colleges define what student engagement means through consultation with the student body. This will differ from college to college depending on a range of factors including mission, context and student population. The diverse nature of UK colleges means that one engagement or representation model does not fit all.

Once the definition of student engagement is agreed, a range of formal and informal opportunities for achieving it are promoted across the college to students and staff and embedded in higher education policies, processes and practices. Ways to communicate the college’s definition of student engagement include through a student charter, student contract or similar documents that stimulate discussion and dialogue between staff and students about their mutual expectations, in particular in relation to student engagement and the student voice.

Senior management play a role in promoting and developing effective student engagement. Quality managers and student representation support staff are key to engaging students effectively as the roles are well placed to influence progress, implement policy, design new initiatives and develop proposals on how to embed student involvement in institutional structures and procedures to help shape institutional policies at all levels.



Feature of good practice

The deliberate steps taken to define and promote a range of opportunities that enable students to act as partners in educational enhancement and quality assurance

York College

The College takes deliberate steps to engage all students in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. The College has supported the development of a Students' Union whose executive meets monthly with the College's Senior Management Team to feed back issues raised by course representatives. Students are actively engaged in the College's committee structure with one full higher education student member on the Board of Governors and regular student attendance and participation across Development and Enhancement meetings and committees. Individual students are able to engage with the College's assurance and enhancement procedures through formal and informal feedback by means of course-specific and higher education-wide surveys and higher education focus groups, which take place in the autumn term, allowing responses to be made and fed back to students during the academic year. Students also feed back through external surveys such as the National Student Survey. A number of College-based surveys have been created through the Quality Improvement Strategy and allow the College to gather feedback at key stages of the learner journey.



Have you considered?

Engaging higher education students at all levels in college decision-making from course representatives through to membership of the governing body

The role that senior managers play in promoting the course representative system

Student representatives meeting with senior staff on a regular, but informal basis, to explore and discuss issues or topics in a more informal setting, prior to (or after) committees to create a much more relaxed and open debate

Senior management leading by example and seeking regular formal and informal engagement with student representatives, in addition to meeting with them as part of formal committee structures

Arranging for the Principal to join meetings of student representatives, or inviting higher education students to open meetings

What is the most appropriate mechanism for advertising the course representatives for each course and how students can get in contact with them

Who has oversight of the course representative system

Staff-student consultative committees as a more responsive way of gathering student feedback

Providing other structured opportunities for course representatives and students to engage in feedback where issues outside the usual agenda of a staff/student liaison committee could be raised

Offering students opportunities to express individual opinions and experiences, ideas and concerns

Using a timetabled session to review a course with students

Enabling students to participate in the design and delivery of programmes

Involving students in designing the module or programme evaluation questionnaires

The timing of student feedback questionnaires

Clearly defining the roles of student representatives in programme and other handbooks

Developing VLE forums that allow representatives from different courses to communicate to see if there are issues in common (positive or negative)

B5

How do the different elements of student engagement relate to one another?

Student engagement does not stop at quality assurance. All aspects of a college's higher education provision should embrace and benefit from student engagement. The overall student experience can be enhanced where providers interpret student engagement as being broader than just something that improves the academic experience. For example, when supporting students in such areas as finance, accommodation and disability requirements, it is useful for colleges to obtain student input to help set the direction and make improvements to the support (even in a limited way), resulting in a more personalised, student-centred service.



Feature of good practice

The integrated and coordinated activity of curriculum areas and student support services to provide comprehensive support for the student learning experience

Reaseheath College

Support staff were able to give numerous examples of the way in which the College had provided support to students including development of academic and employability skills, research training, disability support and financial, welfare and visa advice. The provision and quality of support services is regularly monitored in course meetings, and students are invited to give feedback on them through surveys.

Common practice in module feedback

It is possible to identify a considerable amount of common practice across providers in the mechanisms used to collect and respond to feedback on individual modules.

Module evaluation is most often collected by means of a questionnaire. In some cases other methods are used to collect, or supplement, feedback, such as staff/student meetings or focus groups. Findings may be analysed by the department concerned, or by a central unit.

The outcomes from questionnaires are discussed at programme level, often in a staff-student liaison committee (or equivalent). A summary of findings may be published, for example on the virtual learning environment, or the minutes from the committee discussion may be disseminated.

Findings typically feed into annual monitoring reports (and their resulting action plans) and periodic review, and may also be reported upwards to relevant committees. In some cases, direct intervention (perhaps by the head of department) is triggered when quantitative scores fall below a predefined level.

Some institutions provide a response to feedback in the module handbook, so the next cohort can see what changes have been made. In other cases, students are provided with the outcomes from evaluations to help them make their choice of modules.

How does student engagement lead to improvements?

Collection, publishing and responding to student feedback promotes the enhancement of the learning experience. A well-supported student representative system that sees students views feeding into and shaping a programme will have a positive effect on students, who see the impact of their engagement.

Case study

Stephenson College

One method of obtaining student feedback has been piloted on a Civil Engineering programme at Stephenson College, which the College operates on a national basis. This consists of a periodic group feedback session with the Course Tutor, which has been very successful. The College intends to replicate this practice across part-time higher education programmes.

Quantity Surveying students requested that they cease to participate in the surveying unit of the Higher National Diploma programme and, instead, study something more relevant to their profession. The College discussed this with their employer and agreed that students should study project management instead. Everyone concerned agrees that this has been an improvement for all parties.

Students requested help with preparing for the requirements of professional membership of the Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE) and the Chartered Institution of Civil Engineering Surveyors (ICES). This was discussed at length between the employer and the professional bodies. It was agreed and then embedded into the programme. This has proved to be very successful for the students and the company, who both desire that their staff should hold professional status at the appropriate level. It has also proved very helpful to the College, having attracted the attention of other large civil engineering companies and resulted in further contracts.



Feature of good practice

The extensive and effective engagement of students at all levels

Myerscough College

Student views are sought regularly and systematically and are used to monitor and enhance the quality and effectiveness of the College's higher education provision. Student feedback is analysed in the College's annual monitoring report. The College uses a variety of systems to inform students of the impact of their feedback. Module Information Packs include a commentary on response to the previous year's student evaluations. Posters are placed around the College showing the outcome of the consideration of feedback. Instances where student feedback has resulted in significant change aimed at enhancing the student experience include substantial investment in the information technology infrastructure following student feedback about wireless access and improved facilities in the Higher Education Centre.

Case study

West Herts College

The student voice has been particularly influential at West Herts College (WHC), helping to initiate enhancements at both a strategic and operational level. The introduction of higher education specific student representative meetings in 2008-9 enabled the College to establish regular meetings with students to capture valuable feedback in addition to the more formalised student feedback questionnaires. Following relocation to the new Watford campus in autumn 2010, student representatives requested a designated higher education break out space which was allocated for an initial trial period. Student initiated demand for higher education specific facilities led to the strategic decision to relocate the existing degree centre, to allow further expansion. Higher education student representatives were involved in the design of the degree centre, meeting with members of the College Leadership Group and external designers to develop the degree centre. The College continues to build upon its collaborative working ethos with students through higher education student representative meetings. As such, the College has allocated additional resources to further enhance the degree centre including installation of ID card readers to restrict access to this facility to HE students only, glass doors, telephone line to call helpdesk, television control pad and the provision of Mac computers. The degree centre is currently in the process of being rebranded in response to feedback from Higher National (HN) students, who feel the term 'higher education centre' is now more appropriate in order to include both the Foundation degree students and the increasing numbers of HN students at the College.



Have you considered?

Adopting a deliberate approach to monitoring the success of student engagement

Monitoring representation across different years to identify variations and trends

How to share good practice for the election of students

How student module feedback is reflected in improvements for the subsequent year

Evaluating student engagement in quality assurance activities through, for example, numbers of students returning module evaluations, attendance at staff-student liaison committees, or feedback on consultations

Using annual monitoring mechanisms to evaluate student engagement activity and/or staff-student liaison committee systems

B5

Closing the feedback loop

Colleges can gather students' views of their experience in many ways. Typically, this includes feedback collected at the end of a unit of study. They consider these sources of information, take action where appropriate or possible and inform students of the outcomes.

Carrying out surveys or asking students to complete questionnaires is not in itself sufficient. There needs to be clear evidence of closing the loop – informing students about improvements that resulted from their input. This demonstrates to them that the college is serious about collaborating with them and that their feedback contributes to effective quality assurance and leads to genuine enhancements. Informing students as to how their views and ideas have been acted upon reinforces the validity of their opinions and the importance of their involvement in the wider business of the college.

Closing the feedback loop is a challenge faced by all higher education providers. Common approaches to it include posting information on the virtual learning environment and/or websites, feeding back through staff-student liaison committees and including information in handbooks. This should be a continuous process integrated into the learning experience and benefiting the students who gave the feedback.



Feature of good practice

The Learner Voice database which tracks issues and actions arising from multiple sources of student feedback

Tameside College

The College has developed a Learner Voice database that was piloted over a two-year period before being implemented throughout the College. Students consider themselves to be appreciated as members of committees and forums, and feel that their voice is heard and acted upon. Staff have responsibility for entering issues or concerns and signing off final actions that have been overseen by senior management. Progress and outcomes are reported to the Senior Leadership Team. Resultant actions are communicated to students through the student representative system, a student newsletter, an action plan and 'you said, we did' posters.



Have you considered?

Communicating the outcome of student feedback through:

- course handbooks
- in-course committee minutes through student representatives
- by e-mail
- informally through contact with academic staff
- through an annual report
- on student notice boards

Making it clear to students (in, for example, handbooks or through the student charter) that it is their responsibility to provide the college with feedback and that it is the college's responsibility to act on that feedback and to communicate about this

How you will give timely feedback so that students remain engaged in the process

Giving student representatives the opportunity in teaching time to report back on issues to the students they represent

Introducing mid-module surveys so that current students see the outcomes of their feedback

Whether augmenting online surveys with a paper-based survey would increase response rates and enable valid evaluation of teaching quality against which improvements can be made

How the data gathered is used in the most effective way to have an impact on the quality of the learning experience offered to students

How data is shared beyond programme and departmental level

Establishing a consistent approach to survey administration that includes a standard set of questions to enable effective benchmarking at course and provider level and allows for bespoke questions for particular programmes



Additional resources and further references

Effective Course Evaluation: The Future for Quality and Standards in Higher Education
www.slideshare.net/surveyresults/effective-course-evaluation-the-future-for-quality-and-standards-in-higher-education

Closing the Loop: Are Universities Doing Enough to Act on Student Feedback from Course Evaluation Surveys?

www.swan.ac.uk/media/Closing%20the%20Loop%20Report.pdf

Reflecting the diversity of your student population

A student population can include international students, distance learners, those located on an alternative campus, students on placement, part-time students, and visiting/exchange students. Students and colleges work together to design a range of formal and informal opportunities for engagement and establish a representative model that incorporates different routes to representation and removes barriers to engagement.

All students should be aware of the opportunities available for engagement. Raising awareness of representation and highlighting the role and importance of the student voice during induction is useful but perhaps not the best time to impart detail. Where institutions had taken a proactive approach to following up induction with carefully targeted campaigns, increased levels of engagement and interest were evident. Training is tailored to meet the needs of different student groups using a range of formats, for example, face-to-face, online or through group discussion. This makes training more easily accessible to distance learning students, for example. Student representatives are also provided with the appropriate background to some of the current key issues and discussions within the college, and are given ongoing support throughout the year.

Technology plays an important role in addressing some of the barriers, enabling students to access meetings where physical attendance is not possible. Virtual learning environments (VLEs) and social media offer avenues for student representation and communication.



Have you considered?

How to reduce barriers to participation, especially among part-time students and other traditionally harder to reach groups

Establishing a staff role to engage specifically with distance learners, part-time students and other traditionally harder to reach groups

Establishing a student engagement officer to support student representation and development activity

Scheduling committee meetings to allow part-time students to attend

Creating online opportunities for distance learners to contribute remotely, either via conference calling or through discussion in the VLE

Using VLEs to host information about course committees to make it widely available to all students on a programme, or to host discussion forums for all students to discuss concerns and issues, and to publish minutes and external examiner reports

Using VLEs to host all relevant survey data, information, reports and papers in one central place, making information more accessible to all students and easier to navigate

Making information available through mobile technologies including smart phones, tablets and laptops

Using text messaging as a means of informing students and student representatives about forthcoming meetings to increase feedback and participation rates

Developing Facebook pages or similar at programme level where all students can raise issues

Using Twitter with hashtags as a forum where student representatives can exchange views and ideas

Rewarding or providing forms of recognition for those students who participate in voluntary activities outside the formal academic and assessment structures, in recognition of the fact that these activities have made an important contribution towards enhancing their learning (personal development planning, printing credits)

B5

What kind of training should students be offered?

While the Quality Code does not demand that colleges offer training to facilitate engagement, students need to feel equipped to contribute effectively. Research (The Open University, 2009) has shown the importance of communicating any representative system in a clear and carefully targeted way, underpinned by a comprehensive support and training programme. This enables students to develop their understanding and skills to fulfil a representative role confidently and effectively.

Focusing on committee participation may not be the most appropriate method of student engagement. Clarity of role and the extent to which student representatives are informed about the business of a committee is central to success, as is emphasising the importance of inclusive chairing and making specific efforts to brief chairs to encourage student participation and manage other participants' responses appropriately.



Feature of good practice

The student representation system and the role of the Students' Union President in proactively obtaining learner feedback

Chichester College

Student representatives are well supported and understand their role. They undergo initial training and can participate in additional training, attend workshops and student conferences. They are also provided with opportunities to develop skills to support them in their role, such as the Student Executive Training Day and the Licence to Observe. The Students' Union president takes an active role in providing training, support and guidance and is also engaged in evaluating students' experiences.



Have you considered?

Developing job descriptions outlining student representative duties and responsibilities

Developing training and support materials

Arranging peer mentoring for student representatives

Providing higher education student representatives with handbooks or hand-outs, and induction, that explain about quality assurance and enhancement and the Quality Code

Establishing staff roles to support student representatives who participate in senior and complex committees

Modifying terms of reference to be more accessible to students

Introducing student business on committee agendas alongside the traditional chair's business, to enable student representatives to raise issues on behalf of the wider student body

Producing a regular newsletter for course representatives to keep them in touch with developments in the college

B5

How does student engagement link to quality assurance?

Annual monitoring and periodic programme review play an influential role in the quality management of programmes. Many providers have in place policies such as the inclusion of student representatives on quality committees as full members (see also 'Monitoring and review', page 94).



Have you considered?

Taking steps to ensure that committee panels are given an opportunity to receive views and comments directly from students currently taking the programme

Using a structured method of discussion, asking staff and students simultaneously, but independently, to evaluate a programme and then bringing them together to look at, and discuss, the results

The role of students in monitoring processes, including the materials made available to them, including student module evaluation questionnaire analysis, external examiner reports and programme team responses

What if there are no formal student engagement structures?

If your college has no formal structures for representing higher education students, it is still possible to engage them in quality assurance. Beyond formal student representation on committees, there are many informal ways to get students involved. Where there is a strong culture of student engagement, staff members can discover students' views through informal interactions, with a resultant impact on policy and processes. Colleges may also develop systems to capture the outcomes of informal interactions.

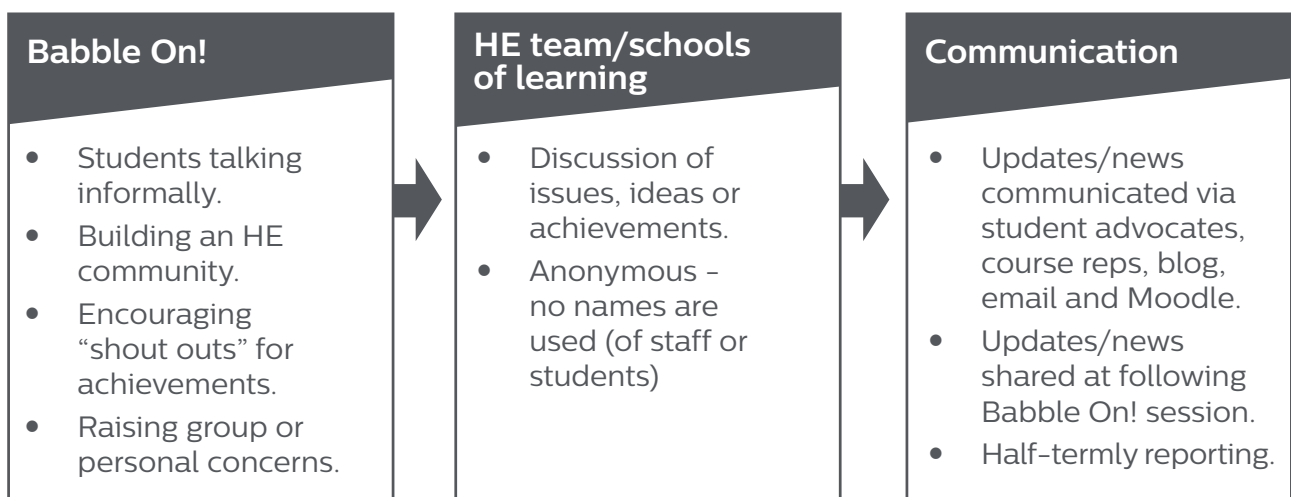
Case study

West Nottingham College

The College takes pride in its ability to get things done quickly and with minimal fuss, but there is also a need for formal channels to articulate what has been done in response to student feedback. The College has therefore introduced the 'Babble On' sessions – informal half-termly meetings with students run by members of the Central Higher Education Team.

Essentially the team member has lunch with the students in the higher education student room and uses this as an informal opportunity to gather student feedback. The students understand that notes are being taken, but also that the feedback is anonymous. This informal approach has led to them speaking freely and with confidence about their concerns but also about positive aspects of their experience, enabling the College to react quickly to the negatives and to promote the positives, such as valued progression opportunities or volunteering experiences.

The notes are brought back to the weekly Central Higher Education Team meeting, at which possible solutions and/or responses are discussed and minuted. Further liaison with curriculum areas may be necessary, but sometimes the team can achieve a 'quick win', for example in the decision to provide higher education students with a higher print credit on their accounts to reflect their need to print lengthier assignments or journal articles. Once the actions have been implemented, the College uses paid student advocates to share the message with their allocated course representatives, who are in turn given an opportunity to share the feedback with their cohort in the next available session. Additionally, the College uses the VLE, its higher education blog and the student email system to share updates with students and provide a regular half-termly report.



Case study

Newcastle College

Meaningful student engagement was identified as a key area of development across the College's higher education provision during the 2013-14 academic year. The Higher Education Directorate organised a series of initiatives in partnership with students, and it became evident that financial issues were a factor limiting participation. As a direct result of these discussions, and with reference to the Expectation of Chapter B5: Student Engagement, the College developed the Higher Education Student Internship programme to overcome the financial barrier - through providing opportunities for students to undertake funded projects focusing on enhancement of the student learning experience.

The Student Internship programme focused on embedding the College's Higher Education Student Engagement and Research and Scholarly Activity (RSA) strategies, which:

- promote the concept of the 'engaged student' as an important driver for quality enhancement (HE Student Engagement Strategy)
- support student-led research projects that have contribute to higher education curriculum design and delivery (RSA Strategy).

The programme was open to students at levels 4, 5, 6 and 7, advertised internally through the intranet, social media, teaching staff and meetings with students. Successful applicants were selected through a robust recruitment process involving the submission of an application form and formal interview (which included a student panel member).

The College recruited eight Student Engagement and five Student Research interns from a range of vocational areas across the institution, paying them through specially established bursaries that were contingent upon successful completion of agreed milestones.

With the shared goal of enhancing the student experience, the interns worked on initiatives within their own vocational area. They agreed upon communication and the enhancement of a higher education community as the overarching theme for their projects. Each intern was assigned a contact in their school, typically a member of the teaching staff, who acted as adviser, facilitating access to the other staff and students as required. Interns produced a short progress report halfway through their project which identified any challenges or barriers they had encountered in setting up and starting the projects. Examples included:

- difficulty in generating interest from students and staff in the projects
- institutional barriers particularly if the project involved changing their approach to communicating with students
- additional demands being made of interns that were outside the remit of their role.

The benefit of having an intern within vocational areas to promote student engagement has been proved by these projects to be invaluable, at both a departmental and an institutional level. The interns' final reports provided a rich source of information and indicated areas for future development. Analysis of the reports highlighted their significant value and benefit in ensuring that students are actively engaged in decision making and the development of the student experience.

The following themes were common to many areas:

- the importance of communication from and between both staff and students in creating a higher education community
- recognising the different needs of higher education students
- raising the profile of higher education outside an individual course environment
- providing opportunities for higher education students to meet and network with other students across the organisation.



The concept of 'students as researchers' is a key theme for the implementation of the College's RSA Strategy. The Student Researcher Internships offered a specialist strand which allowed successful applicants to gain experience and expertise in research through working within institutional research teams. The interns also served on the institutional RSA Committee. One was attached to an RSA project and the remaining interns led a student academic journal project.

In addition the interns were allocated to specific higher education committees which they attended as representatives of the student body. Their contribution ensured that students' views had a bearing on quality and curriculum processes throughout the academic year.

At the end of the programme the interns completed a detailed report and shared their findings with senior managers in their School and the College overall. They presented their findings and experiences at the Newcastle College Group higher education student conference, Students as Producers, at Teesside University's HE in FE Conference (July 2014) and at the British Conference on Undergraduate Research at the University of Nottingham (April 2014).

As part of the project, the College collated data on what motivated students to apply to become a Student Intern. The following quotations are responses to the anonymised questionnaire:

'I wanted the opportunity to effect real change that would improve things for staff and students.'

'It is a way to get your voice heard and really make a difference to the college.'

'It enables me to understand the hows and whys of decisions made in the college. It makes the system more transparent and less frustrating as a result.'

'I have already used my intern role in an interview to demonstrate various skills, including that I can work independently, I can see a project through and I can liaise with other team members in a professional way to get a job done.'

'It makes me stand out from other people with the same degree.'

The positive comments received from staff and students demonstrate the project's important contribution to delivering the College's HE Student Engagement and Research and Scholarly Activity strategies. The project also demonstrates the value of reward and recognition in persuading students to be proactive in the enhancement of their learning experience.



Additional resources and further references

Centre for Higher Education Research and Information, Open University
Report to HEFCE on Student Engagement:

www.open.ac.uk/cheri/documents/student-engagement-report.pdf

*Student Engagement in Learning and Teaching Quality Management:
A Good Practice Guide for Higher Education Providers and Students' Unions:*

www.bath.ac.uk/learningandteaching/pdf/student_engagement/Good_Practice_Guide_11.9.2013.pdf.

Higher Education Academy, *Collecting and Using Student Feedback:
A Guide to Good Practice:* www.heacademy.ac.uk/node/3008

National Union of Students, *Rewarding Reps and Accreditation:*

www.nusconnect.org.uk/campaigns/highereducation/student-engagement/courserephub/supportingcoursereps/rewardingreps

National Union of Students, *Benchmarking Student Rep Systems:*

www.nusconnect.org.uk/campaigns/highereducation/student-engagement/courserephub/supportingcoursereps/benchmarkingstudentrepsystems

Supporting higher education students

This section is about how colleges support students through their higher education journey, with reference to the Chapters of Part B of the Quality Code.

Programme design, development and approval

B1

Policies and procedures

The processes of programme design, development and approval are an essential element of colleges' internal quality assurance and enhancement. They ensure that appropriate academic standards are set and maintained and that the learning opportunities offered to students enable them to achieve the intended learning outcomes for their programmes.

Ultimate responsibility for the approval of programmes rests with degree-awarding bodies. However, all colleges are involved in elements of programme design, development and approval, including programme re-approval, major changes (which may involve reconsidering a programme's aims and design), minor changes, and closure.

The extent to which roles and authority in this area are delegated by a degree-awarding body to its partner college(s) is defined in the agreement between the two bodies. Where colleges have responsibility for designing programmes they put in place internal approval processes that may mirror those of their degree-awarding body and are systematically applied and consistently operated.

Colleges operate a process for the approval of higher education provision that demonstrates:

- strategic fit
- demand and financial viability
- high quality learning opportunities
- robust academic standards.

Decisions about what programmes to offer will be taken within the context of colleges' individual missions and other strategic factors, including advice from external bodies such as employers and industry about workforce needs.

In strategic terms, programme planning approval processes enable colleges to assure themselves that sufficient and appropriate staffing, learning spaces and other learning resources and facilities are available.

Programme design, development and approval depend on reflection and critical self-assessment both individually by staff and collectively within college structures. Programme approval involves a number of stages and various staff members and students at the college as well as external advisers such as employers and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies. Those involved are clear about their individual role, the hierarchy of procedures and the point at which the degree-awarding body definitively approves the programme for delivery. Although some stages may seem similar, they provide a different perspective or focus, and each is important to ensure that any proposal has been adequately considered by all relevant parties.

Higher education provision is dynamic, and programmes are continually evaluated and revised to improve the learning experience and maintain the currency of the curriculum. Internal monitoring and review processes play a major role in programme evolution.



Have you considered?

Whether the design of each programme is aligned to the college's strategic mission and goals

Whether programme design, development and approval processes operate as part of strategic and academic resource planning and are informed by both academic merit and the business case

Whether programme design, development and approval processes are coherent, transparent and understood by staff, students and other stakeholders

Whether programme approval processes clearly detail realistic timescales, terminology, roles, responsibilities, levels of authority and the hierarchy of procedures

Whether decision making is objective and impartial

Whether information on programme design, development and approval, changes and closure processes is accessible to all those who need to know about it

How programme design, development and approval processes are applied to Higher National programmes

B1

Programme rationale and purpose

Proposals have significant staff, student and employer input from the earliest stages of development, and staff should be able to articulate clearly the rationale and purpose of the programme.

Proposals may include, among other aspects:

- an explanation as to how the programme aligns with the college's strategic aims,
- the identification of the intended student profile
- outcomes of any market research that evidences a recruitment and employment market, employer and student expectations, and any professional body requirements
- the intended purpose(s) of the programme, which may include personal, professional, vocational and/or academic development; or preparation for specific or general employment
- the intended learning outcomes necessary to meet the programme's purpose
- the mechanisms by which students will demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the learning outcomes
- organisational aspects such as the workload and the volume and nature of assessment necessary for students to meet the intended learning outcomes
- details of the level of the qualification, its credit value,¹¹ and its alignment with internal, national and other relevant frameworks
- how inclusive practices in learning and teaching take account of the entitlements of students with protected characteristics
- relevant qualitative and quantitative data used to inform programme design and development, including market research, student performance and feedback, and, where possible, data disaggregated by protected characteristics
- a definitive record of the programme (the programme specification).

¹¹ According to the credit frameworks; see www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/academic-credit



Have you considered?

Whether the design of the programme:

- makes appropriate use of the Qualifications Frameworks, in particular *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)*
- makes use of the relevant Subject Benchmark Statement(s) and, if applicable, the *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark*
- makes appropriate use of the Credit Frameworks
- reflects relevant college strategies and policies (for example on admissions, assessment, teaching and learning, and equal opportunities)
- makes appropriate use of other helpful non-mandatory reference points such as QAA's guidance on enterprise and entrepreneurship education¹² and on education for sustainable development¹³
- provides an appropriate level of academic challenge and rigour in accordance with the Subject Benchmark Statements, the academic standards set by the degree-awarding body, and any other relevant reference points
- develops students' capabilities, including their ability to manage their own learning, and provides them with adequate opportunities to achieve the specified learning outcomes
- provides students with adequate employment-related opportunities and other 'skills for the twenty-first century graduate', as appropriate¹⁴

B1

Staff involvement in design, development and approval

Processes for programme design, development and approval involve staff from across the college, including academic teaching staff and professional services staff. Colleges enable all those involved in this area to fulfil their role effectively, through appropriate support, training and continuing personal and professional development.

¹² *Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Education: Guidance for UK Higher Education Providers:* <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/enterprise-entrepreneurship-guidance.pdf>

¹³ *Education for Sustainable Development: Guidance for UK Higher Education Providers:* www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=533

¹⁴ See also the QAA Scotland Enhancement Theme on this topic: www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/enhancement-themes/completed-enhancement-themes/graduates-for-the-21st-century



Feature of good practice:

The wide-ranging institutional support for the development of all academic and support staff, especially relating to curriculum design and enabling student development and achievement

Tameside college

The College's commitment to staff development for underpinning the effectiveness of the design, development and approval processes for new programmes is evident. The College's Higher Education Staff Handbook lays out the principles by which programmes are designed and developed, and it is made clear that programmes should meet demand from both students and employers and should fit with the College's strategic plans. The importance in programme design of the FHEQ, Subject Benchmark Statements and meeting the Expectations of the Quality Code is also emphasised in the Higher Education Staff Handbook.

Examples of support include the dissemination of clear knowledge about the Quality Code within staff communities associated with the teaching and support of higher education programmes, and the involvement of support staff at an early stage of programme development to facilitate the planning and provision of learning resources.



Have you considered?

How all those involved in programme design, development and approval (both internal and external participants) are supported to fulfil their roles through appropriate training and support

How staff are enabled to work together, drawing on collective experiences and developing innovative ideas

How staff who have not been part of the design, development and approval of the programme, but are involved in teaching or supporting student learning will gain an understanding of the aims, structure and content of the programme

Arranging for staff unfamiliar with programme design and the processes of development and approval to work alongside or observe a more experienced colleague, for example through observation or membership of programme approval panels

Facilitating staff involvement in programme design, development and approval processes at other colleges

B1

Student engagement in design, development and approval

Students are able to make a valuable contribution to their own higher education experience and that of others. Their involvement in programme design, development and approval processes may be formal or informal, and is proportionate to the activity taking place, and should be representative of the student body (including those students with protected

characteristics). Formal student input can be face-to-face – for example by means of discussion at staff-student liaison committees – or through surveys or questionnaires. Informal student input can be obtained through discussions with current students on related programmes (or on the actual programme, for significant amendments) at the end of lectures or through virtual learning forums, and/or through discussions with recent graduates (of related or actual programmes).

✓ Feature of good practice

The rigorous and well embedded programme development and approval processes which involve extensive engagement with a range of stakeholders

Rotherham College of Arts and Technology

There is a comprehensive College Quality Code which sets out the quality assurance arrangements for all higher education provision. Staff are fully aware of the guidance that it contains relating to the development of new provision, and found this to be thorough and objective. They spoke positively of the continuous dialogue with employers as new provision was developed.

College Approval Panels include students in their membership. Students see their involvement as a way in which they can actively contribute to the development of programmes and testify to the responsiveness of the College in listening to their views.



Have you considered?

Collecting the views of students on proposed programme content through focus groups or by including students on panels taking decisions on programme approval

Collecting feedback from students studying in cognate areas, or on modules that address study skills (for example, personal development planning)

Asking students to identify issues relating to equality of opportunity within the programme, the balance of workload and assessment

How you clarify for students the place of the proposed new programme within the college's existing portfolio of courses

Supporting students' contribution to programme design, development and approval processes by means of appropriate training

B1

External input and scrutiny

External input is fundamental to programme approval, to bring objectivity and independence to decisions taken and to contribute to the setting and maintenance of academic standards. External perspectives and advice also contribute to the enhancement of a programme. Individuals may be drawn from other subject areas or professional services within the college or from other higher education providers, depending on their role.



Feature of good practice

The proactive engagement with external stakeholders to design new programmes to meet professional and technical skills needs

Somerset College of Arts and Technology

The College makes effective use of external expertise in the maintenance of academic standards. Programmes are designed and developed through proactive engagement with employers and other external organisations. The College is committed to updating or refreshing programmes to reflect employment trends and changes in professional practice. The Foundation Degree in Healthcare Practice was developed in partnership with a local hospital in response to a clinical need, and the proposed Foundation Degree in Health and Social Care, which aims to offer a simultaneous Qualifications and Credit Framework¹⁵ qualification, has arisen from one of the College's Change Plans.

The College has successfully developed and achieved a culture of externality and consistently uses external expertise across its academic framework, including programme design and validation, and, where appropriate, assessment. At the final validation stage, appropriate use is made of validation panel members external to the awarding bodies and the College.



Have you considered?

Seeking advice from:

- academic staff from a different subject area within the college
- staff with professional services expertise, such as library and learning resources staff
- staff from other colleges
- contacts made through partnerships, at other colleges, in industry or professional practice
- contacts from academic subject associations and the Higher Education Academy
- contacts from relevant sector networks, such as those concerned with developments in pedagogy and technology-enhanced learning
- representatives of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies, whether or not the programme is regulated or accredited
- external examiners
- employers, for example through industrial advisory boards
- the local enterprise partnership
- organisations in the communities with which the college works
- alumni and/or students studying in cognate areas

¹⁵ The Qualifications and Credit Framework:

www.accreditedqualifications.org.uk/qualifications-and-credit-framework-qcf.html.

This non-QAA framework comprises all secondary further and higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and is cognate with the FHEQ in Part A of the Quality Code.

The nature and extent of external input to programme design, development and approval is proportionate to the stage of the process or the decision being made. For example, the design of a wholly new programme often draws on a wider range of external advice in design, development and approval than the approval of minor changes to existing provision.

Evaluation

Colleges regularly evaluate programme design, development and approval processes to ensure they remain effective and fit for purpose. Highlighted good practice is disseminated and opportunities for improvement are identified. Student views contribute to the evaluation; for example, students may be asked to reflect on whether the approval processes provide sufficient opportunity for student input.

Case study

Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education

When developing a new programme (or revising an existing one) programme teams align what they are proposing to the reference points that maintain academic standards. Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education aligns its internal validation processes to the following Part and Chapters of the Quality Code:

- Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards
- *Chapter B1: Programme Design and Approval*
- *Chapter B5: Student Engagement.*

The Institute has devised Codes of Practice aligned to the Quality Code to ensure that new programmes meet UK expectations for standards and quality in higher education.

The Codes of Practice operationalise not only the degree-awarding body's regulations for developing a new programme but also how national standards and requirements are to be built in.

The Institute conducts internal validation for all new programmes and for those undergoing revalidation. This has been recognised as good practice (during the scrutiny for acquisition of foundation degree awarding powers) and ensures that all documentation meets Institute standards before it proceeds to a partner university for approval or to an external stakeholder for review.

Students have a twofold involvement: as critical reviewers of the programme(s) and as a support mechanism for the team responsible for the programme undergoing validation.

The internal validation process ensures that programmes are designed in such a way as to meet national expectations. It considers all aspects of programme design, with especial focus on learning, teaching and assessment, placing a value on innovation. It ensures that learning outcomes align with assessment methods and are mapped to the relevant Subject Benchmark Statements. Staff members train colleagues who will be involved in future validations.

In summary, the Quality Code is used to ensure that:

- academic standards are met
- students are engaged in course design
- programmes are designed to meet national expectations for quality.

This thorough approach ensures programmes are designed to a high standard prior to submission for approval by a partner university.

Recruitment, selection and admission to higher education

B2

What do we mean by recruitment, selection and admission?

Recruitment activities are targeted at individuals who are actively weighing up the prospect of entering or continuing in higher education. Selection is the process by which a higher education provider considers the applications for places on a programme and decides which individuals to accept. The post admissions boundary is the point at which a prospective student who has been accepted for a programme enrolls with a college and becomes a current student.

B2

Principles of fair admissions

Sound practice in accordance with *Chapter B2* of the Quality Code is underpinned by the 'principles of fair admissions' set out by the Schwartz Report (2004).¹⁶ This states that a fair admissions system should:

- be transparent
- enable higher education providers to select students who are able to complete the programme as judged by their achievements and their potential
- strive to use assessment methods that are reliable and valid
- seek to minimise barriers for applicants
- be professional in every respect and underpinned by appropriate organisational structures and processes.

Effective student engagement with the application process (which for the purposes of the toolkit is set at the point where a prospective student enrolls with a college and becomes a current student) will maximise a college's ability to select students who are able to complete their programme and ensure all students have a good applicant experience. The applicant experience will be enhanced where different activities and disparate teams are integrated across all stages of recruitment, selection and admission.

B2

Strategic considerations

Admissions policies and procedures ensure that the college's mission and its values are reflected in recruitment, selection and admission processes, including how the college engages with applicants, whether or not they are offered a place.

A comprehensive admissions policy may formally recognise the importance to a college of particular aspects of recruitment, selection and admission (for example, widening access), and is likely to set out what this means in context.

The policy or policies, which cover all modes and levels of study at the college, support staff professionalism and coherent practice, and facilitate measuring and monitoring. (Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision).

Where colleges work with degree-awarding bodies or with other delivery organisations, written agreements between the parties specify which of them is responsible for recruitment, selection and admissions processes (or how these responsibilities are shared).

C

Staff involvement in the admissions process

Colleges have policies and procedures in place with which all staff involved in recruitment, selection and admission are familiar, and to which they adhere. Such staff (who may include academic as well as administrative staff) are fully briefed on the requirements of their role.

¹⁶ Schwartz Report (2004) *Fair Admissions to Higher Education: Recommendations for Good Practice*

Policies and procedures clarify who is authorised to undertake admission decisions and where authority and responsibility for each stage of the admissions process lies.

Colleges ensure all staff (including those working outside the college, nationally or internationally) who engage with applicants and /or the application process have sufficient experience, have up-to-date knowledge and are appropriately trained to carry out their roles in a professional manner. This knowledge and training is likely to ensure:

- considerate and timely interactions with prospective students and their advisers
- transparent, efficient and effective communication with other interested parties such as parents or employers
- thorough checking of applications to ensure that prospective students meet the necessary entry requirements, including those specified by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs)
- the ability to devise ways of enabling prospective students from a range of different backgrounds to demonstrate their potential to succeed in their studies
- signposting to additional advice and guidance
- commitment to training, CPD and professional development regarding admissions procedures.

B4

Staff development and training

Colleges will normally be able to identify and address training needs through their staff appraisal processes. However, colleges may wish to consider whether additional training is appropriate, for example, where academic staff are involved in interviewing applicants (which would require them to be familiar with the application process, interview procedures and good practice). Staff with decision making responsibilities may require equality and diversity training or briefing in a range of potential entry routes, to counteract potential bias that can arise from educational and cultural differences; this will enable them to recognise the potential of applicants seeking to enter higher education through a variety of different routes.

C

Appeals and complaints

Colleges include their admissions appeals and complaints procedure within the admissions policy, or clearly link it to a separate appeals and complaints procedure while stating their commitment to a fair and professional handling of complaints in the admission policy itself. Where colleges include admissions appeals and complaints procedures within a general student appeals and complaints policy which is readily accessible to prospective students, the relevant policy document, as well as the admission policy should make this clear.

B2

The decision-making process

Colleges have a clear timetable for considering the quality assurance mechanisms they have in place for monitoring and evaluating their admissions process and their feedback policies and procedures, and for reporting on these through internal committee structures. They also have effective mechanisms to ensure changes are communicated to relevant staff.

Data is collected and analysed where available. This may include the analysis of data and statistics on applications, offers and acceptances; it may also include reflection upon how internal and external developments have impacted upon admissions processes, or upon feedback from staff in relation to their operation and efficacy.

Colleges regularly review their application materials and processes to ensure they remain fit for purpose, that they do not unduly discriminate against any potential applicant groups and that any supporting information, advice and guidance required to complete a suitable application is reasonably accessible.



Feature of good practice

The highly effective operation and monitoring of admissions procedures

Dearne Valley College

The College has policies and procedures in place to ensure fair admissions, which are clearly structured and centrally administered and overviewed. The information provided for applicants is accessible, explicit and presented consistently on the website. There is a single point of reference containing guidance for programme staff involved with interviews. The interview process is designed to ensure that applicants fully understand the requirements of the programme they wish to follow. The College is responsive to suggestions for improvement and has an effective annual review of its admissions process in place.

Colleges may have little to no involvement in the review or development of the admissions policy, depending upon their delegated responsibilities. However, strong channels of communication should be in place for briefing staff about changes or policy updates. Where a college works with several degree-awarding bodies particular care should be taken to manage the different admissions policies.



Information to help students make informed decisions

Accessible, reliable and trustworthy information is necessary to ensure that prospective students understand the nature of the learning experience they can expect on particular programmes. Such information enables applicants to make informed choices in the light of their career aspirations and preferred learning styles, and ensures that the investment they make will be based on an accurate understanding of what is offered.

Prospective students will rely on information and advice available as part of their application to assist them in reaching an informed decision. High-quality, up-to-date and accurate information, advice and guidance is made readily available to prospective students.

Channels and media for communication are likely to include:

- prospectuses and related literature
- websites
- Key Information Sets
- promotional materials including for example leaflets and videos
- college events such as open days and pre-sessional events.

Through these channels, prospective students are offered information about their intended programmes of study, including (but not exhaustively):

- the content, including the individual modules and the definitive record or programme specification
- the entry requirements
- the level and mode of study
- where teaching is located, especially when this takes place: across different campuses; off-campus through third-party organisations; or via a range of media (as in flexible or distributed learning)
- total programme costs including tuition fees and other additional costs
- details of any financial support that may be available, including needs-based bursaries and academic scholarships (and their eligibility criteria)
- appeals and complaints policies and procedures (including appealing admissions decisions)
- professional body accreditation and career/progression routes.

Potential students can also expect to find information about the demands of higher education study generally, the nature of the application process, and what support might be available to applicants. This is likely to include details about:

- how the UCAS¹⁷ Tariff and recognition of prior learning (RPL) are used to determine whether entry requirements are met
- stages and timescales of the application and admissions processes and
- how applicants' suitability will be assessed
- alternative pathways, including for disabled students
- how to apply for the Disabled Students' Allowance
- flexible learning opportunities
- childcare
- the proportion of Welsh-language teaching available (where applicable)
- the use of contextual data and information, for example educational, geo-demographic and socio-economic background data, to help support applicants in making an informed decision.

B11

Further guidance on providing information for prospective students can be found in Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision. Guidance on providing information for prospective research degree students can be found in *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*.



Feature of good practice

The proactive and comprehensive academic, learning and pastoral support provided to students from initial application through to completion of their studies

Chelmsford College

The Information, Advice and Guidance Team and the Curriculum Team Leader offer effective support for prospective students throughout the application process. Applicants are invited to meet with the College's Curriculum Team Leader, and through this system the College builds links with the students and their employers. The College also hosts open days for prospective applicants. The Information, Advice and Guidance Team maintain strong links with their counterparts at the University, and they provide support and are available at information evenings for prospective applicants.

C

Minimising barriers for applicants

Colleges make admissions policies, which should be available on request in different formats, clear and accessible to external audiences through their website. Policies and procedures detail how and to whom applicants should apply. Where a college operates under the admissions policy of its degree-awarding body, colleges make this clear to prospective students and applicants. Links may be provided to the policy and other documents on the partner's website.

¹⁷ Universities and Colleges Admissions Service: www.ucas.com;
for information about the revised Tariff see: www.ucas.com/advisers/guides-and-resources/tariff-2017



Feature of good practice

The high quality and level of support provided for non-traditional entry students during the admission process and the early stages of their programme

Croydon College

The College recruits a high proportion of non-traditional entry students and has implemented an effective range of approaches that take into account this recruitment profile. Students that may require additional support to study at higher education level are identified early and monitored throughout their time at the College.

B2

Transparency

Colleges have policies and procedures in place that are clear and explicit and cover everything from initial enquiries through to formal application. The admissions policy makes it clear whether additional assessments, for example in the form of interviews, auditions, tests, submission of portfolios and so on form part of the application process for certain programmes, how these methods will be used, and how the outcomes inform the selection process.

Admissions policies include details about the process for making selection decisions, and the timescales involved. Procedures for recording and justifying selection decisions are systematically and consistently implemented. Offers made are clear and easy to understand, and consistent with published entry requirements.

Colleges may offer feedback to unsuccessful applicants, either automatically or on request, and have an established complaints and appeals procedure that is transparent and easily found. Giving feedback offers colleges the opportunity to enhance the applicant experience and their own reputation. It allows applicants to be better prepared for future applications and interviews and move constructively forward. However, it is for the college to determine the nature and extent of feedback they provide. This should be made clear in the admissions policy.

Colleges review student numbers and targets regularly. They pre-empt likely programme closures by arranging alternative programmes or progression routes for students, either an alternative within the college, or a programme at a different provider. There are clear channels for communication of programme changes, and colleges provide relevant additional information, advice, guidance and support for affected students at the earliest opportunity.



Have you considered?

Having a section tailored specifically to higher education admission in your further education admissions policy, if a separate higher admissions policy does not exist

Whether your admissions policy is informed by strategy and the college's mission and values

Whether you have clear policies and procedures in place for all your recruitment, selection and admission activities

How everyone involved in recruitment, selection and admission (including staff based outside the college, nationally or internationally) know, understand and implement policy

Whether academic staff are adequately trained to carry out interviews

How you know that policy translates into practice

How you monitor, evaluate and refine your policies and procedures

What statistical reporting procedures are in place to inform senior management about higher education course admissions

How unsuccessful students can appeal against a decision

What lessons have been learnt from appeals, complaints and feedback

Whether and how you offer feedback to unsuccessful applicants

Whether there are clear and timely channels for communication of programme changes

Establishing a formal process for checking that information for prospective students is fit for purpose, complete and consistently presented, and that it can be easily accessed and understood

Publishing programme specifications alongside or in the prospectus



Additional resources and further references

Supporting Professionalism in Admissions (SPA), web-based resource: www.spa.ac.uk

Schwartz Report (2004): *Fair Admissions to Higher Education:*

Recommendations for Good Practice: www.admissions-review.org.uk

Supporting Professionalism in Admissions (2008) *Fair Admissions to Higher Education:*

A Review of the Implementation of the Schwartz Report Principles Three Years On:

www.spa.ac.uk/information/fairadmissions/schwartzreportreview

Competition and Market Authority (CMA), *UK Higher Education Providers:*

Advice on Consumer Protection Law:

www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/415740/HE_providers_-_advice_on_consumer_protection_law.pdf

Induction and transition into higher education

This subsection explores how induction establishes students' expectations about studying at higher education level and about engagement in quality assurance.

B2 What do we mean by induction and transition?

Students should be ready to engage in their higher education and be enthusiastic about the opportunities on offer. To achieve this, induction into higher education starts before students arrive. Successful applicants value meeting staff and current students to provide them with advance information about the college and the learning experience.

The most effective pre-entry interventions include:

- providing information about the college and the programme
- informing expectations relating to the academic experience including independent learning and academic skills that characterise higher education
- building social capital (links with peers, current students and staff that can subsequently be used for communication, information and support)
- nurturing a sense of belonging.

Preparing students in advance for the academic environment, and enabling them to develop realistic expectations, can be achieved through a range of media including pre-arrival support materials, social media, summer schools and lectures.

The transition to higher education and the need to develop skills as independent and autonomous learners will challenge students in ways that could cause discomfiture and dissatisfaction as they adjust to the demands of higher-level study. For some students, it may be a considerable challenge to develop a habit of engagement commensurate with the learning outcomes expected of graduates and postgraduates. This challenge should be supported by a structured learning programme, with appropriate academic support at each stage, so that the learner is able to progress and demonstrate the appropriate outcomes. The learner must be an active participant in this process, aware of mutual responsibilities, owing to this expectation being embedded in the public information provided by the college.¹⁸

Feature of good practice

The tailored academic support provided for students transitioning into, and between, higher education levels

Hadlow College

The College has a range of strategies and initiatives designed to enhance student learning and foster independent learning. There is a well established summer school for applicants which provides an introduction to studying at higher education level. Through its Expert Learner Strategy, the College has extended the summer school concept to run a formal scheme of work delivering study skills support through the first half term of Level 4 programmes.

¹⁸ Further information can be found in *Responding to Feedback from Students: Guidance about Providing Information for Students*: www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=201



Have you considered?

Offering one-off initiatives to support transition

Offering modules that introduce the core study skills required for higher education programmes, such as academic writing skills, critical thinking and research skills

Induction can include content and activities that encourage students to adopt a proactive, critical and cross-disciplinary approach to their higher education study. It can publicise to students the opportunities for, and impact of, engaging as partners in the quality of their higher education experience.

Induction aims to alleviate the problems associated with transition and help new students adapt to their new circumstances as learners and participants in the higher education environment. It is critical to student success and to their sense of association with the college. The emphasis should be on integrated, coordinated activity between support services and academic support, schools, departments and the diverse group of students who enter higher education from a variety of backgrounds.



Have you considered?

How your induction programme:

- **is inclusive of all student groups**
- **addresses the needs of a particular group**
- **integrates teaching staff and student services**
- **provides time-relevant targeted information that is readily accessible**
- **provides students with informal opportunities to get to know their teaching staff**
- **is part of an ongoing programme**
- **encompasses social, personal, cultural and academic processes of transition**
- **develops students' understanding academic expectations and procedures**
- **offers opportunities for interaction between new and established students**
- **allows students who are unhappy with their programme to transfer**
- **is evaluated**

Progression and transition to work or further study

B4

This subsection invites you to consider how well you are preparing students for their progression and transition to further academic or professional awards, or employment.

During students' period of study their learning environment is likely to change. Higher education providers manage this in such a way as to enable them to develop and progress.



Feature of good practice

The integrated approach to transition from entry to higher education through to further study and employment

Bridgwater College

The College works closely with both staff and students to support a smooth transition between levels of study. It recognises the challenges in preparing Level 3 students for higher-level study and aims progressively to increase their capacity for independent learning. A Higher Education Academic Development Scheme (HEADStart) was introduced to improve students' academic writing and referencing skills and thus aid the transition from Level 3. Information about higher education programmes and support services is provided on completion of previous programmes, supplemented by talks with higher-level students, higher education careers fairs, open days and evenings, and progression newsletters.

From the outset the College provides clear and comprehensive information to prospective students about the employment opportunities relevant to their programmes. A wide range of guest speakers and employers are brought in across all programmes to help students determine a career choice.

B4

Developing academic skills

Academic skills are those generic and transferable skills that underpin higher education learning, enabling students to become confident, independent, critical thinkers and reflective learners. Colleges consider ways in which they can enable students to develop their academic potential through the development of such skills as reasoning, research, numeracy, writing and referencing. Such provision takes account of the needs of a diverse body of students and is appropriate to the level of study. For example, many first-year students have to adapt to new learning and teaching methods.

Colleges encourage students to become effective learners who make the most of the opportunities on offer and acknowledge how developing appropriate academic skills will benefit them in their future careers. Colleges help students to do this through personal development planning (PDP) and by helping them to identify their personal, academic and employability needs, reflect on their experiences, and record their achievements.



Feature of good practice

The carefully tailored support for its student population, which the College further strengthens by integrating the Academic Skills Team into mainstream teaching

Calderdale College

Higher education staff, students and external examiners speak overwhelmingly positively about academic support. Of particular note is the focused collaboration between the college-level Academic Skills Team and teaching staff to develop students' academic skills.



Have you considered?

How you prepare Level 5 (foundation degree students) for Level 6 (top-up study at bachelor's level)

Embedding the teaching of academic skills throughout the curriculum

Developing online support guides

Offering one-to-one support

Offering tutorial sessions or seminars that include academic skills development

B4

Personal development planning (PDP)

The primary objectives of PDP are to enhance the capacity of students to reflect, plan and take responsibility for their own learning and to understand what and how they learn. PDP is based on the skills of reflection and planning that are integral to knowing how to learn in different contexts and to transfer that learning throughout life.

PDP results in enhanced self-awareness regarding strengths and weaknesses, and what needs to change. The process helps learners understand the value added through learning that is above and beyond the formally scheduled opportunities for the subjects they study. Crucially, it relates to their development as a whole person, but also has benefits for others with whom they interact, including academic staff.

Colleges have a strategy and policy framework for implementing, monitoring and enhancing their PDP provision. PDP has a clear presence at programme level that encourages students to take ownership of their own PDP practice, processes and records.



Have you considered?

Offering staff development opportunities to help them implement PDP

How the views of students, staff and employers inform the enhancement of PDP practice

How PDP is implemented to support the needs of particular groups of students

How and when students receive advance information on support for PDP in their programme

Offering students opportunities to engage in PDP activities at each stage of the programme and across a range of learning contexts

How students feed back on their experience of PDP provision



Additional resources and further references

A Toolkit for Enhancing Personal Development Planning Strategy, Policy and Practice in Higher Education Institutions:

www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/PDP-toolkit-second-ed.pdf

Personal Development Planning: Guidance for Institutional Policy and Practice in Higher Education:

www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/Personal-development-planning-guidance-for-institutional-policy-and-practice-in-higher-education.pdf

Ward, R, et al (revised edition 2009) *Personal Development Planning and Employability*, Learning and Employability Series 2, York: The Higher Education Academy

Employability and career management

B4

Developing skills for employability

Working in partnership with students and employers, colleges develop strategies to promote students' employability and their ability to transfer their knowledge, skills, attitudes and values into real-life contexts. Strategies take into account the student profile and the diverse aspirations of individual students, as well as the programme portfolio, to offer a mix of curricular, co-curricular and extracurricular approaches.



Feature of good practice

The embedding of employability into the curriculum

Bridgwater College

The College has embedded employability into the curriculum by developing the Bridgwater Higher Education Advantage, an initiative that feeds employability into the design and management of programmes and also develops employability skills that enable students to compete in the employment market. Students confirm that employability skills are well embedded into their programmes and some have whole units focused on generic employability skills and work experience, which students find very useful. Most programmes also have connections with local industry. Where there is no compulsory work experience, many students still find a work placement, some with the support of staff, and some by themselves.



Feature of good practice

The effective and coherent approach within the curriculum to developing students' employability

Kidderminster College

The curriculum is specifically designed to promote employability. Programmes include content that is designed to develop employability skills and an understanding of the industry related to the programme. Where appropriate, programmes include work placements. Student employment prospects are further enhanced by a stringent Personal Development Plan process supported by staff. Staff teaching on programmes are practitioners in the field and bring their experience to the classroom. Visiting lecturers who are employed in the relevant industry are also invited to contribute to programmes to strengthen the students' understanding and employability prospects.

B4

Facilitating career management

Career education, information, advice and guidance enable students to make choices about their future. Colleges ensure that all staff and, where relevant, external agents involved are appropriately informed about the local, regional, national and international graduate labour market. Colleges engage with employers and, where appropriate, professional, regulatory and statutory bodies. Students have access to appropriate, well informed careers advice and impartial, student-centred, confidential careers guidance.



Have you considered?

Developing an employability strategy in collaboration with students and employers

How employability is addressed: through the curriculum, co-curricular activity, extracurricular activities, or all of these

How you facilitate effective employer engagement

Promoting extracurricular activities and volunteering opportunities for students to develop skills and experience

Offering work-based and work-related learning activities including live design briefs, industry competitions, case studies, simulations, role plays, discussions, presentations, workshops and mentoring

Developing students' enterprise and entrepreneurial skills to support employability

Embedding education for sustainable development in the curriculum to prepare students for future career challenges in an evolving economy

Involving alumni and developing alumni case studies and stories to demonstrate the value of employability



Additional resources and further references

Skills for employability

QAA (2012) *Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Education: Guidance for UK Higher Education Providers*:

www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=70

HEA guidance: www.heacademy.ac.uk/workstreams-research/themes/employability

HEA Student Employability Profiles: www.heacademy.ac.uk/node/4434

HEFCE (2009) *Supporting Higher Education in Further Education Colleges: Policy, Practice and Prospects*:

www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2009/200905/

Skills for the emerging twenty-first century economy

QAA (2014) *Education for Sustainable Development: Guidance for UK Higher Education Providers*:

www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=533

Drayson, R; Bone, E; Agombar, J; and Kemp, S (2013) *Student Attitudes Towards and Skills for Sustainable Development*: www.heacademy.ac.uk/node/2770

Extracurricular skills

QAA (2013) *Recognising Achievement Beyond the Curriculum: A Toolkit for Enhancing Strategy and Practice*:

www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2719

Assessment

Assessment lies at the heart of the learning experience. How learners are assessed shapes their understanding of the curriculum and determines their ability to progress.

Throughout UK higher education, assessment processes are based on explicit intended learning outcomes, both for programmes and for the elements that constitute them (modules or similar units). The intended learning outcomes set out for the student what they should expect to achieve through the programme and its constituent modules; provide employers and other stakeholders with information about the currency of students' learning.

Assessment is not a linear process but an ongoing cycle through which staff design, set and mark assessment tasks, engage in dialogue about performance, and review and develop assessments ready for the next cohort. Nevertheless, from the students' perspective it does have a linear quality, in that their efforts are focused on doing well in consecutive assessments, leading to a final outcome that will influence their future. Getting assessment right is therefore pivotal to the quality of the student experience.

B6 What do we mean by assessment?

Assessment involves two distinct aspects and is usually subdivided into two categories, often known as formative assessment and summative assessment.

Formative assessment has a developmental purpose and is designed to help learners learn more effectively by giving them feedback on their performance and on how it can be improved and/or maintained. Reflective practice by students sometimes contributes to this.

Summative assessment has a more formal purpose and is used to indicate the extent of a learner's success in meeting the criteria used to gauge the intended learning outcomes. The marks awarded count towards the final mark/classification of the programme or module.

These definitions are not exhaustive. Constructive feedback on work is not provided exclusively through formative assessment, and summative assessment should also be capable of promoting student learning.

B6 Policies, regulations and processes

The process of assessment is a key element in the setting and maintaining of academic standards. While degree-awarding bodies have ultimate responsibility for the academic standards of their awards, colleges are involved in, and accountable for, the effective operation of different aspects of assessment in all its forms. The specific roles of colleges are as set out in the written agreement with the degree-awarding body. Assessment policies, regulations and processes should be clear and accessible to all those who need to make use of them.



Feature of good practice

The thorough and comprehensive assessment process which is over and above the requirements of the awarding organisation

Brockenhurst College

The College designs, schedules and marks assessments within the framework set by its awarding organisation. The Assessment and Quality Assurance Handbook outlines key roles and responsibilities alongside the principles of assessment design. A set Work Submission Procedure clearly details the stages of assessment to staff and students, as well as setting policy on feedback, extenuating circumstances, deadlines, and missed assessments.

B6

The purposes of assessment

In the remainder of this section, unless stated otherwise, the term assessment should be understood as referring to **summative assessment**, though many of the principles can be applied to formative assessment.

Assessment serves a number of purposes. The main purpose of summative assessment is to measure student learning in a way that recognises it through the award of credits or equivalent (the combination of which can then lead to a named qualification). Academic staff form a judgement as to what extent students have achieved the intended learning outcomes of a programme, or of an element of a programme.

However, of equal importance is the recognition that assessment should also be an integral part of learning, or that summative as well as formative assessment can, and does, facilitate student learning. The link between assessment and learning is reinforced in *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching* which addresses feedback as part of the learning and teaching process.

The importance of the purpose of assessment may differ according to circumstances.

For the student individual assessments provide a motivation for study, and they promote ongoing learning by providing feedback on performance and helping students to identify their strengths and weaknesses.

For the teaching staff assessment provides an opportunity to evaluate the knowledge, understanding, ability and skills attained by different students. The overall profile of student performance offers useful information for assessing the effectiveness of course content and teaching methods, thereby facilitating improvement.

For the college assessment provides information upon which decisions as to students' progression and the receipt of awards may be based. The assessment process enables the college to ensure that appropriate standards are being met, in accordance with nationally agreed frameworks, such as Subject Benchmark Statements and the *Qualifications Frameworks*. Information generated by assessment, such as mark or grade distributions, forms a valuable tool for quality assurance and enhancement.

Other stakeholders also have an interest in the assessment process. Professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) may use assessment outcomes to award professional accreditation and/or 'fitness to practise' status (see '[Meeting professional requirements](#)' on page 87). Employers use an individual's assessment record as a means of assessing their educational achievements and suitability for employment.

Assessment processes are implemented effectively when all staff involved have the necessary knowledge and skills, and have received appropriate development or training, to fulfil their specific role.



Have you considered?

How staff new to an assessment role develop the knowledge and skills required

How you promote understanding of the theory and practice of assessment and its implementation, including the different purposes of formative and summative assessment

Improving how you evaluate the extent to which learning outcomes have been achieved

Establishing effective ways to engage with students to enable and promote dialogue about, and reflective use of, feedback

How you enable staff to learn about new approaches to assessment and devise new methods, as well as the best ways to operate existing methods

Raising staff awareness of the assessment implications of student diversity, including cultural diversity, differences in learning modes and the need for inclusivity

B6

Assessment in course design

Programme/module teams will be involved in designing, or reviewing the design of, assessments used to test whether the learning outcomes have been achieved.

The need to build an overall assessment strategy into the design of a programme cannot be too strongly emphasised.

Finding the right model

In building assessment into course design, programme teams are likely to find it helpful to refer to the definitive record or specification of the programme, the relevant qualification descriptor (in the *Qualifications Frameworks*), the relevant Subject Benchmark Statement, and other guidance (including supplementary guidance publications from QAA).

One approach is to consider the following model, setting out three stages of programme/module design.

Stage 1: Decide on the intended learning outcomes. What should the students be able to do on completion of the course, and what underpinning knowledge and understanding will they need in order to do it, that they could not do when they started?

Stage 2: Devise the assessment task(s). If you have written precise learning outcomes this should be relatively straightforward because the assessment task(s) should test whether or not students can satisfactorily demonstrate achievement of the outcomes.

Stage 3: Devise the learning activities necessary (including formative assessment tasks) to enable the students to satisfactorily undertake the assessment task(s).

The likelihood that more than one iteration might occur reflects the need to ensure what is sometimes referred to as 'alignment' between the learning outcomes at programme and at module level; in other words to ensure that the learning outcomes at programme level are actually being addressed through the combination of modules.

College processes are likely to include guidance on course design, which take account of issues relating to assessment and its fit with learning outcomes.



Have you considered?

How the assessment process enables learners to demonstrate achievement of all the intended learning outcomes

Whether there are criteria that enable internal and external examiners to distinguish between different categories of achievement

Whether there can be full confidence in the security and integrity of assessment procedures

Whether the assessment strategy has an adequate formative function in developing student abilities

What evidence there is that the standards achieved by learners meet the minimum expectations for the award, as measured against relevant Subject Benchmark Statements and the Qualifications Frameworks

B6

Following college procedures and guidance

College procedures are likely to include expectations or guidance on course design, which take account of issues relating to assessment and its fit with the learning outcomes. One approach is the use of a grid through which staff indicate how assessment methods map to the stated learning outcomes. This can be an effective way of demonstrating that the choice of method is appropriate for each outcome being assessed – although it may not demonstrate that it is necessarily the best.

Selecting assessment methods

At the design stage staff consider, and make a choice between, methods of assessment, depending on how much choice is available with college limits (and PSRB limits if applicable).

There may be restrictions or general principles to bear in mind such as:

- the preference for using more than one assessment method (unless there is a compelling reason to only use one)
- the need to ensure that students have opportunities for formative assessment in a method that is being experienced for the first time in the programme.

The ‘traditional’ vehicles for the assessment of students’ achievement have been essays and examinations, with practical examinations in areas such as the sciences. However, a much greater range of assessment modes is now being employed, as exemplified in the following subsections.

Written examination

A question or set of questions relating to a particular area of study

Written examinations usually occur at the end of a period of learning and assess whether students have achieved the intended learning outcomes. They may be ‘seen’ (where students are aware in advance of the question(s) they are expected to answer) or ‘unseen’ (where the questions are only revealed in the examination itself). In an ‘open-book’ examination, a student is allowed to use a selection of reference materials.

A written examination may require a range of different responses, including writing essays, writing short answers, solving problems or use of multiple-choice. Written examinations usually (but not always) take place under timed conditions.

Written assignment, including essay

An exercise completed in writing in the student's own time

This is a written exercise that typically has a deadline attached but which is not carried out under timed conditions. A well known example is the essay, where students are required to write about a particular topic or answer a question in depth. Other examples include written briefings on particular topics.

Report

A description, summary or other account of an experience or activity

There are many different kinds of report: often students are required to produce a report after participating in a practical activity such as fieldwork, laboratory work, work experience or a placement. Reports typically have a prescribed format and can serve as the culmination of a project.

Dissertation

An extended piece of written work, usually for purposes of summative assessment

A dissertation is a substantial piece of writing deriving from research that a student has undertaken. Dissertations are the result of a student's independent work, carried out under the guidance of a supervisor. Subject areas may follow different conventions in relation to what precisely is required.

Portfolio

A compilation of coursework produced in response to specific assessment briefs

Portfolios of work are a usual component of art and design programmes, and frequently feature as an assessment method in competence-based qualifications. Typically, a portfolio contains a number of pieces of work, usually connected by a topic or theme. Students are usually required to organise their work and perhaps supplement it with reflective accounts in the form of diaries or logs.

Project output

The product of project work, often of a practical nature (excluding report/dissertation)

Students may be assessed on the output of a period of project work (see also Report and Dissertation). Examples are diverse and include the staging of a play or other performance, a piece of artwork, a new product or a poster, structured notes, tables of information and associated commentary.

Oral assessment/presentation

A conversation or oral presentation on a given topic

Examples of oral assessments and presentations might include conversations, discussions, debates, presentations and individual contributions to seminars. This category would also include the viva voce exam, which is typically used by institutions in specific circumstances, such as to clarify assessment decisions or to test the thesis of a doctoral candidate.

Practical skills assessment

Assessment of a student's practical skills or competence

Practical skills assessment focuses on whether, and/or how well, a student performs a specific practical skill or technique (or competency). Examples include clinical skills, laboratory techniques, identification of or commentary on an artefact, surveying skills, language translation or listening comprehension.

In the performing arts context, a performance can be used to assess the practical skills of individual students (or groups of students). It usually takes place as a 'one-off' live performance viewed by an examiner, though sometimes the examiner may review a recorded performance.

Group critique

A method of receiving feedback from both tutors and peers

In the visual arts, the group critique is an established method of receiving either formative or summative feedback from both tutors and peers.

Set exercise

Question or task designed to assess the application of knowledge or of analytical, problem-solving or evaluative skills

Examples include data interpretation and data analysis exercises, and problem-based or problem-solving exercises.

Closing remarks about assessment methods

The above list is presented as indicative to reflect that approaches to assessment vary according to the subject, mode of delivery and institution, and can change over time.

Methods are described in terms of how they are used to assess course-level information rather than being evaluated from a pedagogical perspective.

B6

The amount and timing of assessment

The amount and timing of assessment are important considerations in ensuring fairness. These must be addressed at the design stage and need to be considered both within the individual modules and across the whole programme (taking into account the combination of subjects in a two or three-subject programme). This ensures that students are enabled to bring their best efforts to bear on the assessment tasks and that treatment within and across programmes and disciplines is equitable.



Feature of good practice

The annual planning of assessment and the timely and developmental feedback provided for students

North West Kent College of Technology

There is a good range and variety of assessment tasks. Assessments are well timetabled, enabling students to plan their workload. Timely and developmental feedback is given to students to help with future assessments. Students spoke positively about the speed with which helpful feedback is provided and how the effective planning of assessment allowed them time to consider and reflect.

Amount of assessment

The amount of assessment embraces both the number of tasks within the module (and across the programme) and the size of those tasks. Decisions of this kind are significantly influenced by the nature of the discipline, and there may be expectations laid down by the relevant PSRB for externally accredited programmes as well as by your institution (see [Meeting professional requirements](#) on page 87). However, the specific intended learning outcomes that are being measured remain central. Not every outcome has to be explicitly assessed in every task, but students should generally have more than one opportunity to demonstrate the achievement of an outcome.

Decisions about the amount of assessment need to take into account the overall workload for the student in the module/programme. A 20-credit module indicates a notional student learning time of 200 hours which includes all teaching activities, any private study, and all aspects of preparing for and completing the assessment tasks. Students will reflect on what they perceive to be the fairness or otherwise of the workload placed on them and will make comparisons across modules and with their peers on programmes in other disciplines.

Timing of assessment

On the timing of assessment tasks, a key factor for students is whether tasks are evenly spread across all their modules, allowing sufficient time to prepare for and complete each one. Timing is also critical in ensuring that students can receive feedback and can act on that feedback. Taking a view across the whole of a year or stage therefore helps in recognising where the pressure points will be, and thinking about how much time there is for students to assimilate learning from lectures, practicals and so on, as well as the relevant reading.

Weighting of assessment tasks

The weighting of assessment tasks has a bearing on the validity of the assessment process: that is, whether student learning is being measured effectively. It affects how the overall performance in the module is judged. For example, if there are two assessment methods employed, should they be weighted 50:50 in terms of the final mark for the module or in some other proportion? (Is one of more importance than the other, either in terms of the size of the tasks or their significance for measuring learning outcomes?)

Assessments where a pass is mandatory

There is also the question of whether any assessment element must be passed, irrespective of the performance in other elements. For example, there may be certain skills in which you require students to demonstrate competence, without which they would be unable to pass the module. This is common in, but not restricted to, programmes in professional disciplines such as medicine, nursing and teaching.

Meeting professional requirements

In many disciplines, particularly those of a vocational nature such as nursing, engineering or social work, students who successfully complete their degrees will also achieve professional accreditation, by meeting the requirements of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs). The relevant body may require that the assessment process meets certain criteria, for example:

- a certain proportion of a student's credit must come from unseen examinations
- a student must have demonstrated particular professional competences - normally referred to as 'professional standards'
- a limit is placed on students' entitlement to resit failed modules.

External examiner involvement in assessment design

An important aspect of the external examiner's role in maintaining standards concerns the setting of assessment tasks. While staff might have been asked to draft some or all of the tasks, these may be scrutinised by the external examiner. The extent to which he or she is involved will have been agreed on their appointment, including which tasks they will be expected to look at.

Language requirements

The vast majority of UK higher education provision is taught and assessed in English. Where this is not the case, certain considerations must be addressed to ensure that academic standards are not put at risk. Any proposal to involve another language in place of English is likely to require early approval by the awarding institution (some actually prohibit it) so that appropriate arrangements can be considered. It is crucial that the teaching staff and external examiners allocated to the programme have expertise in the additional language.

Assessment of work-based/placement learning

When designing valid and reliable assessment for work-based/placement learning it is important to consider the extent to which staff from the placement provider or employer will be involved in making or contributing to assessment decisions. This might involve providing feedback to inform the marking, or actually undertaking marking.

As many placements occur in professional programmes, the relevant professional body will have laid down its own expectations regarding the conduct of, and involvement in, assessment. This is likely to be made explicit through the programme approval/accreditation process. Extensive resources are available on the subject of work-based learning, including the Higher Education Academy's resources.

B6

Informing students and providing feedback

Helping students understand assessment

To become effective learners, students need to develop 'assessment literacy' - an understanding of, and readiness for, the assessment process. They should be helped to understand:

- the nature and purpose of assessment
- the language of assessment and assessment processes
- the principles of sound assessment
- the relationship between assessment and learning
- the complex nature of professional judgement.

Students are enabled to develop an understanding of the expectations and processes of assessment, and how they can maximise their chances of being able to demonstrate their full potential. There is a focus on explaining, and demonstrating the use of, intended learning outcomes, assessment criteria and feedback. Working with real, meaningful examples, containing useful ideas and content is one way to achieve this. Planning this activity early in programmes assists students with induction and transition into the curriculum.

Students should also be clearly informed about assessment safeguards, such as second marking, moderation and external examining.



Have you considered?

Whether and how students understand the assessment criteria that you use

Whether students understand the standards required to achieve a particular grade for each criterion or overall

Discussing the assessment criteria with students before they start a task

Showing students examples of work and talking about how these would be assessed

Using previously marked work to show how feedback was used to improve the quality of later submissions

Asking students to submit a brief evaluation of their work along with their assignments

Allowing students to assess a piece of work against the criteria, awarding marks, writing feedback and discussing the process

Recognition of prior learning

Students are provided with clear guidance on how their prior learning will be judged through the assessment process before they submit evidence in support of the claim.

Good academic practice

Assessment literacy also incorporates student ability to recognise and apply good academic practice and being clear about the types of activities that constitute unacceptable practice including plagiarism, cheating, collusion and impersonation.



Have you considered?

Raising awareness of staff about the importance of designing assessments that minimise opportunities for plagiarism and other forms of unacceptable academic practice

Whether students are properly informed about how they are expected to reference the work of others

How the college prevents, identifies, investigates and responds to unacceptable academic practice

How the college informs students of the potential consequences of unacceptable academic practice

How the handling of individual cases takes account of the needs of the students, including those arising from protected characteristics

Utilising electronic submission and text matching software to help identify plagiarism

Feedback to students

Effective feedback combines information that enables students to understand the strengths and limitations of their past performance and information that enables them to recognise how future performance can be improved.

One of the key elements of the assessment and feedback process is the development of students' assessment literacy through communication between staff and students, which involves discussion of, or explicit reference to, the assessment/grading criteria.

Colleges consider the timing and timeliness of feedback to ensure that it is received when there is sufficient time for students to reflect on it and decide how they might improve their performance on the next assessment task.

Different forms of feedback are considered, taking into account the nature and media of assessed work. These might include the return of work with written comments, the provision of oral feedback (either in addition to, or instead of, written feedback), or evaluative discussion on either a one-to-one or a group/cohort basis.



Have you considered?

Making use of exemplar assignments or model answers to help reinforce feedback and stimulate discussion

The extent to which feedback focuses on intended learning outcomes

Involving employers where the work involves work-based or placement activity

Introducing peer assessment through which students comment on each other's work

How students involved in assessment through peer-to-peer activities are provided with guidance to help them fulfil their role

Self-assessment to encourage students to reflect on their work

B6

Marking

Having ensured that the assessment strategy for the programme or module has been designed in a way that is rigorous and consistent with college and/or degree-awarding body regulations and/or procedures, colleges also ensure that marking is carried out in a way that is transparent and fair.

Staff carry out all aspects of assessment, including marking, in a way that ensures the integrity of the assessment process and of the academic standards of each award.



Have you considered?

These key areas of potential risk:

- **any circumstance where draft assessment questions/tasks are, or student work is, held or transported off-site (for example where marking takes place off-campus, and where scripts are sent to an external examiner)**
- **the invigilation of examinations**
- **confirming the identity of students undertaking assessments (whether in an examination room or online) or submitting work (whether in person, online, or through other means)**

A key aspect of fairness is ensuring that marking is consistent, especially where there are a number of examiners involved. Staff involved in marking and moderation are guided on the mechanisms to be used when marking. Guidance might include:

- a marking scale
- marking schemes (often called ‘grade descriptors’)
- information about:
 - whether anonymous marking is required
 - various forms of second marking
 - the role of the external examiner(s)
 - use of quantitative data
 - administrative procedures for recording and verifying marks.

B6

The marking scale

When marking student work (including formatively assessed work) staff are clear about what marking scale they are expected to use and to ensure that they are clear about how this is interpreted, so that different examiners all work with it in the same way.¹⁹

For the majority of institutions the 0–100 scale is used (some use alternatives such as letter grades). In a number of subjects there is a tradition of not using the full scale. In Mathematics a mark of 90 or even 100 will be achieved, but such a mark is rarely heard of in Law or some other subjects, notably in the Arts and Humanities.

B6

Marking schemes

The nature of any marking scheme or grading criteria will depend on the college and the tradition within the specific discipline. In some, detailed marking schemes will be appropriate as a way of guiding all examiners. These may take the form of model answers, with the marks awarded for each part of the answer indicated. In others, agreement over what is being sought in each answer may be achieved through test marking of a sample of work by all markers and a discussion based on this.

The challenge for all involved in marking is to reduce the scope for inconsistency when applying the given marking scheme. Processes referred to below, such as second marking, help to reduce such inconsistency, but as far as possible all those involved in using a marking scheme need to have a shared understanding of it.

B6

Anonymous marking

Anonymous marking is marking where the name of the student is not revealed to the person marking his/her work. Its use is widespread but not universally accepted by either staff or students. In particular, there is a tension between the perceived benefits of anonymity and its conflict with the principle of giving personalised feedback. Evidence suggests that students are more likely to take heed of feedback where it is tailored to their individual needs, based on the marker’s knowledge of their progress. However, this is less of an issue for summative feedback processes than it is for formative feedback.

For a number of disciplines the nature of the assessment activity makes anonymous marking impractical (in activities involving performance, for example). In some types of work such as dissertations, where the student is working, under supervision, on an individually selected theme, it is difficult to mark anonymously; however this may not be the case in relation to the second marker who may not have been involved with the work prior to submission.

As with any aspect of assessment, the main issue is the need for clarity and consistency, ensuring that exceptions to the relevant assessment policy are justified and that this justification is understood by staff and students alike. The need for clarity also extends to ensuring that staff and students are clear about when, and in what circumstances, anonymity will be removed. For example, this may be necessary to take into account exceptional circumstances. (See also [Examination boards and assessment panels](#) on page 93.)

¹⁹ There is a strong body of opinion that the use of numbers to judge the achievement of learning outcomes is inappropriate. In particular see: Rust, C (2011) and Yorke, M (2009).

Second marking

This is a second stage of marking, which may be for checking, sampling or moderation purposes. Colleges employ different approaches to it, in terms of both what their expectations are and precisely how they are implemented. This is an area where practice between disciplines necessarily varies, reflecting differences in the type of assessment task and submission media.

The main possible approaches to second marking are:

- **open marking** (where the second marker is informed of the first marker's mark before commencing); one form of open marking is **check marking** (see below)
- **closed/blind marking** (where the second marker is not informed of the first marker's mark)
- **independent/double marking** (each examiner makes a separate judgement and in the event of disagreement a resolution is sought)
- **check marking** (where the second marker determines whether the mark awarded by the first marker is appropriate and confirms it, or questions it if need be).

One factor that may guide the choice of approach to second marking is the volume of student work to be marked. In recent years there has been a significant shift away from the double marking of all student work towards the use of sampling.

New staff or those new to teaching in higher education may find that a higher proportion of their students' work is second marked (compared with the work of colleagues' students). This is because the experience of the marker is a factor that colleges take into account in deciding which assessments should be second marked.

Moderation

Moderation is used variously in practice. It is not the same as second marking but essentially refers to the arrangements that colleges put in place to ensure consistency of marking, including the proper application of the assessment criteria. This can include rescaling marks based on the consideration of quantitative data, as outlined below, as well as the sampling of scripts by internal and external examiners.

External examining

The role of external examiners has evolved over the past 20 to 30 years, primarily because of the changes in higher education resulting from its so-called 'massification' and diversification (of students and institutions). Rarely do external examiners now act as examiners in the pure sense of marking submitted work; for most institutions the role is now more about moderating through sampling student assessment tasks and output (sometimes referred to as a 'calibrator' role). External examiners comment on the reliability of the assessment process - especially whether assessment criteria have been appropriately applied - and on its fairness.

External examiners will offer an opinion when consulted by the internal examiners in the event of their being unable to agree; however, in this situation the involvement of a third internal marker is often preferred. The final decision in each and every case is explicitly that of the relevant board of examiners, exercising delegated authority from the senior academic committee of the university or college (see [Examination boards and assessment panels](#) on page 93).

Through sampling assessed work and judging the reliability and appropriateness of the internal marking, the external examiner may reach the view that marking has been unduly harsh or generous. Where this is the case the college or department should have in place guidance as to what action should be taken. In some cases this may involve considering whether to raise or lower the marks for the entire cohort, or even undertaking some remarking (time limits may often make the latter impractical).

All aspects of the way in which internal examiners engage with the external examiner will have been agreed by the degree-awarding body at the outset of the external examiner's term of office. Guidance is given on the likely interaction with the external examiner, and staff may have been given an opportunity to meet him or her.

While the degree-awarding body is responsible for the standards of its awards, external examiners play an important role in objectively ensuring that they are maintained. Their opinions and judgements are significant – persuasive rather than binding, but not to be rejected lightly or without a dialogue taking place.

B8 Using quantitative data to evaluate marking

Statistical information relating to the results of different groups of students (for example within or across modules, including trend data – usually over three years) can assist the process of determining whether marking has been appropriate. Such data might include pass rates and/or average marks, which can be compared between different markers, and between different programme providers (in the case of partnership provision).

College practice varies as to when and how such data are considered. Consideration of the data at or before the board of examiners' meeting facilitates moderation by enabling informed decisions to be made about the current cohort. Increasingly colleges are putting in place information systems capable of generating such data quickly.

Careful analysis of data is required. Where the mean mark for a module is higher than might be expected, this does not necessarily mean that the module has been too easy; it could be the result of innovative teaching methods, particularly where students have developed a strong interest in the topic; or it might occur for a number of other reasons. This is where the experience of more senior examiners, and in particular the external examiner, will be significant.

B6 Administrative procedures

Procedures for recording, verifying and adjusting marks are key to the maintenance of standards. Security is of the utmost importance here. It is also desirable to have processes for verifying that marks presented to examination boards are accurate and complete. This verification includes ensuring that all parts of a student's work have been marked, that marks have been correctly transcribed to the front sheet of examination scripts, and so on.

It is therefore important that staff are clear about what the procedures are, and which tasks, such as inputting and checking marks, are their responsibility. It is also important to ensure that staff are clear about the deadlines for each stage of the marking and recording process. Typically, and especially at the end of the academic year and during reassessment periods, timelines for each aspect of the assessment process are very tight and can fail if one stage is not completed when required. For example, a board of examiners cannot make its decisions without a complete set of marks for the module or programme.

B6 Examination boards and assessment panels

Where appropriate, colleges establish boards of examiners for their programmes (sometimes known as assessment boards or assessment panels) as the bodies with formal responsibilities for overseeing the assessment process at module, departmental and/or programme/award level and for making decisions about individual students' assessment outcomes. Regulations, policies or processes make explicit among other items the requirements relating to membership, quoracy, recording of decisions, and the exercise of discretion.

In many cases, but certainly not all, boards of examiners operate on a two-tier basis: one tier charged with determining individual module or unit results, the other with progression from one stage or year to another and the overall final result for the named award. Where a single tier applies, it is important to be clear about how decisions about the marks awarded for individual units relate to the overall decision about progression or the final award. Where two tiers are used there may be some variation in how they are formulated. For example, the higher level board (programme/award board) may not have the authority to change decisions about individual marks decided by the first tier/module board.



Have you considered?

How staff who chair boards of examiner/assessment panels are trained

Offering training to staff involved in record keeping at board meetings



Additional resources and further references

QAA (2012) *Understanding Assessment: Its Role in Safeguarding Academic Standards and Quality in Higher Education*:

www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/understanding-assessment.pdf

Rust, C (2011) 'The unscholarly use of numbers in our assessment practices; what will make us change?' *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 5(1):

<http://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/ij-sotl/vol5/iss1/4/>

Yorke, M (2009) 'Honours degree classifications: what we can and cannot tell from the statistics', *Quality Matters*, QAA

Monitoring and review

The processes of programme monitoring and review provide a formal opportunity for higher education providers to reflect on their academic provision and consider how it may be changed to enhance the student learning experience. Colleges recognise the importance of assessing and evaluating the effectiveness, relevance and validity of their programmes alongside the quality of the student experience.

Programme monitoring is a continuous activity that takes place throughout the year. Programme review occurs less frequently, but periodically and to an agreed cycle.

Academic governance

B8

The extent to which roles and authority for programme monitoring and programme review are devolved or delegated to colleges by their degree-awarding body is defined in the agreement between the two bodies depending upon delivery arrangements. However, degree-awarding bodies are ultimately responsible for academic standards and the quality of any learning opportunities delivered through others on their behalf. Therefore, even in cases where the responsibility for annual monitoring and review activity resides with colleges, the degree-awarding bodies retain overall responsibility for the quality and standards of the awards that they validate for delivery elsewhere.

In general, colleges under validation or franchise arrangements produce monitoring reports for their degree-awarding body partners according to the requirements of their partnership agreements.

The outcomes of the monitoring process feed into a pyramidal structure of committees at programme, department, school and provider level to assure quality and standards. Issues and enhancements can be highlighted at provider level and any resultant action identified and disseminated back down through the committee structure.

Organisational oversight

B8

Monitoring and review processes provide assurance, at a strategic level within the college, to the degree-awarding bodies and other relevant external agencies that the college is managing academic standards robustly and has a clear policy and procedure for enhancing student learning opportunities.

The monitoring and review of programmes ensures that colleges continue to make available to students appropriate learning opportunities that enable the intended learning outcomes of the programmes to be achieved. They also evaluate student attainment of academic standards and confirm that the higher education provision continues to align with the college mission and strategic priorities.

Programme monitoring and review enable colleges to reflect on the learning opportunities students have experienced, the academic standards achieved, and the continuing currency and relevance of the programmes. These processes also enable higher education providers to consider the extent to which each programme's aims - set out during its design, development and approval (*Chapter B1: Programme Design, Development and Approval*) - have been achieved (*Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards*). The monitoring and review of programmes also provide opportunities to ensure the student voice has been heard and to respond to feedback from students and from other stakeholders such as employers.

The outcomes of monitoring and review, which may lead the college to reconsider the design of a programme, are reported to relevant college committees, and/or degree-awarding bodies as appropriate. Colleges put in place mechanisms to oversee these processes and identify any overarching themes. They determine whether strategic action is required in any areas and use the outcomes of the processes to inform organisational planning at an operational level.

B8

Changes to programmes

Monitoring and review help identify where changes to enhance a programme may be made and how they may be acted upon. Where potential improvements are identified through programme monitoring and review processes, these are formally recorded and their implementation is monitored through action plans.

Opportunities for change may also be identified more organically, through the ongoing engagement of students and staff. Colleges, in accordance with the agreements they have with their degree-awarding bodies, ensure that there are no unnecessary barriers to making changes to enhance a programme, and that it is possible to introduce enhancements in a timely fashion, to ensure that the academic interests of students are not jeopardised by the change.

Changes implemented as a result of monitoring and review are, in turn, subject to further monitoring and review at the appropriate time, as the ongoing process of quality assurance and enhancement is cyclical.

Changes vary in scale and effect, and colleges and their partners clearly define how they distinguish between different types of change, the process and level of authority needed to agree them, and the period of notice required to enact them. This includes a clear definition of the circumstances under which a programme needs to be reconsidered through any stages of the college's or degree-awarding body's programme approval processes (*Chapter B1: Programme Design, Development and Approval*).

Mechanisms are in place that enable colleges to consider the cumulative effect of small changes to programmes. Thus they ensure that the criteria for programme design, development and approval are still met and that programmes continue to align with their aims and intended learning outcomes, and with the college's strategy and mission.

When substantial changes are proposed to the content and/or character of a programme, or any change to the name of the qualification, colleges take into account the effect on the student learning experience and take steps to consult all students affected. They consider how the changes may be implemented while maintaining academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities, which may include introducing them on a phased basis if necessary. Students receive sufficient notice of forthcoming changes.

B8

Closing a programme

Colleges have an agreed and planned procedure for managing the closure of a programme, which includes protecting the academic interests of all students already enrolled on the programme (including those who may have taken a break from their studies), and those who have applied for admission to it. The quality of the learning experience is safeguarded during the period in which the programme is being withdrawn, enabling current students to continue studying in line with UK expectations and complete the programme, even though there are no new entrants.

Staff engagement with monitoring and review

Higher education providers recognise the wider value, in terms of enhancement, of involving staff in programme monitoring and review, by putting in place opportunities for staff training, support and development. Members of staff who are new to the processes are enabled to work alongside or observe more experienced colleagues to experience how monitoring and review are managed.

Staff who contribute to programme monitoring and programme review are drawn from across the college, including academic and professional services staff. Where a college works with other organisations to deliver higher education, relevant staff contribute to monitoring and review.

Colleges ensure that all those involved are aware of their responsibilities and are able to fulfil their role effectively. Colleges recognise the value and mutual benefit for their own provision of enabling their staff to become involved in programme monitoring and review at other colleges.

Student engagement with monitoring and review

Annual monitoring and periodic programme review play an influential role in the quality management of programmes. Many providers have in place policies that include that student representatives sit on quality committees as full members of the panel.

Students are involved in programme monitoring and review in both formal and informal ways. The nature and extent of student involvement in monitoring and review is proportionate to the scale of the process involved. Engagement could include a survey of all students on a module, programme or in a department, with the results feeding into the review, and/or student focus group meetings attended by groups of students at different stages in their programmes.

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

Feedback is collected through a range of different mechanisms. Where students, not directly involved in the programme, have a defined role in the processes of monitoring and review, there is clarity about their responsibilities. Higher education providers take steps to ensure that they take into account the views of the student body, including students with a diversity of protected characteristics. Higher education providers facilitate the contribution of all students involved by ensuring appropriate training and support is provided, determined by the role the student is taking.

External expertise

Higher education providers seek appropriate advice on academic standards, and the quality of learning opportunities, and ensure that there is sufficient independence and objectivity in any decision making.

Colleges therefore draw on a range of perspectives to inform the evaluation phase of the review process. They take into account the outcomes of professional body reviews, and they encourage programme teams to seek the views of current and former students, staff

from other academic subjects (where relevant), external examiners (through their reports), employers, placement providers and so on. External experts can advise as to whether programmes delivered are academically coherent, current in terms of the most recent academic, professional and industrial developments and relevant to the needs of employers.

This externality contributes to the transparency of monitoring and review processes and provides a basis for comparability of academic standards across the higher education sector (*Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards*).

B7

The role of the external examiner in monitoring and review

Degree-awarding bodies are expected to ensure that an external examiner is appointed for all academic provision leading to a higher education award (*Chapter B7: External Examining*). This is reinforced through QAA review methods (see [Higher Education Review](#) on page 104) where there are clear expectations that higher education providers, including colleges, are making robust use of their external examiners. The external examiner can play an important role in helping the college (including the programme team) to assure itself that academic standards are being maintained. However, they can also act as a ‘critical friend’, offering advice through their external perspective on the development of the programme.

External examiners’ reports

An important element of the external examiner’s role is the provision to the college of feedback relating both to the standards achieved and to aspects of the quality of provision.

Such feedback will be provided formally through a written report submitted annually to the college (this could be through the degree-awarding body), but may also be provided informally to the programme team at the module/programme boards.

The external examiner is not simply employed once at the end of the year. There is likely to be scope for interaction throughout the year, and this should be discussed with the external examiner on or before his/her appointment. Involvement tends to be more direct and extensive in disciplines where assessments are more practical/visual, such as performing arts and fine art, but this does not have to be solely the case. Practice varies between institutions and between disciplines on whether, and to what extent, external examiners meet with students. It may be dependent upon the partnership agreements.

B8

Annual monitoring

Annual monitoring, as an important part of the academic cycle, is a key quality management and enhancement process. It provides colleges with an opportunity to reflect on their current provision (at module, programme, department and college level); to highlight successes that may be appropriate for wider dissemination; and to consider how the learning and teaching experience for students may be improved. Reflection enables appropriate action to be identified and taken forward. Annual monitoring is therefore evaluative rather than descriptive, evidence-based, and focused on action and enhancement. It generates evidence that standards are being maintained and that the quality of programmes and of the resources that support them is being managed effectively.

Annual monitoring plays a role in:

- considering the continued currency and validity of a programme
- maintaining the academic standards set by the degree-awarding bodies and/or organisations
- monitoring student performance against the intended learning outcomes
- monitoring and enhancing how assessment is managed
- evaluating the effectiveness of learning and teaching resources and identifying matters requiring attention

- evaluating the student experience and identifying enhancements
- reviewing the impact of enhancements already being implemented
- identifying, promoting and disseminating good practice.

The aim is to highlight and record areas of provision that have gone well over the previous year and to identify those in which there is a need for improvement. This is a key reason why colleges ensure that, as part of the academic cycle, robust information is systematically obtained from students, external examiners and stakeholders. Such information does not necessarily reflect any deficit in quality, but is part of routine quality assurance procedures designed to facilitate enhancement.

Annual monitoring information is systematically considered at a senior level in the college to identify good practice and opportunities for further improvement, and to inform strategic initiatives that lead to quality enhancement.

Monitoring processes are used systematically and consistently and are capable of being applied to all higher education provision offered. They are evidence-based and transparent.

Evidence comprises qualitative and quantitative information, which may include (but is not limited to):

- recruitment, selection and admissions data
- student progression and achievement data
- feedback from students, NSS and other appropriate survey sources
- information made publicly available or reported to external bodies including PSRBs
- reports from external examiners and external verifiers
- feedback from alumni, staff and employers.

Where possible, data are disaggregated by protected characteristic in order to identify any differential impact on particular groups of students.



Feature of good practice

The rigorous, robust and self-critical approach to programme monitoring and review demonstrated through the process of the Programme Quality Self-Assessment Reports (PQSAR)

East Kent College

There is extensive evidence of frequent and detailed programme monitoring and review using the PQSAR system. This procedure is overseen by the Higher Education Committee which has a specific PQSAR objective in its revised terms of reference. The College requires use of a PQSAR template which has now been revised following discussion at Higher Education Committee level. Individual programme PQSARs feed into an overall summary report.

Student achievement and progression data are used as statistical evidence for monitoring and action planning, including the use of data dashboards linked not just to PQSARs, but also to quarterly Programme Area Performance Reviews, completed by the senior management team within the College. This self-assessment process includes retention and achievement data; evaluation of progress from the last action plan with targets and updates; two reflective updates during the year; peer review of interim and end-of-year monitoring conclusions; responses to external examiner feedback; and a new action plan.



Have you considered?

Taking steps to ensure that committee panels are given an opportunity to receive views and comments directly from students currently taking the programme

Using a structured method of discussion, asking staff and students to evaluate simultaneously, but separately, the programme in question and then bringing them together to evaluate results and inform further debate

The role of students in monitoring processes including the materials made available to them including student module evaluation questionnaire analysis, external examiner reports and programme team responses

B8

Periodic programme review

Operating alongside annual monitoring, periodic programme review is a mechanism by which one or more programmes of study are reviewed regarding quality, standards, continuing viability, and relevance to both internal and external needs. The process typically involves experts from other higher education providers.

Programme review, which occurs less frequently than monitoring, albeit on a periodic basis and to an agreed cycle, enables colleges to take a holistic and strategic view of a complete portfolio of programmes, with critical advice from a panel of internal and external peers and external subject experts. It may also be the mechanism by which continuing approval of current provision is confirmed.

Depending on their delegated responsibilities, colleges may have limited involvement in the periodic review of programmes. However, periodic review plays a central role in the enhancement of learning and teaching, at both departmental and college level, by facilitating reflection and, where required, taking action on:

- the continuing appropriateness of the overall aims of programmes
- the currency of programme content and the level of student achievement of the programme learning outcomes, with reference to the Quality Code (including the *Qualifications Frameworks* and any relevant Subject Benchmark Statements)
- the continuing relevance of programmes in relation to the needs of students, the requirements and needs of external stakeholders such as employers, and the strategic direction of the department and of the college
- the effect of cumulative changes to programmes and of the introduction and withdrawal of programmes during the period covered by the review
- the future enhancement of programmes both individually and collectively
- the effectiveness of quality management and enhancement processes
- areas of good practice, to be identified and disseminated across the college.



Have you considered?

The college's delegated responsibilities in relation to monitoring and review

How you collate qualitative and quantitative higher education data and how data from different programmes is reviewed to identify overarching or common themes

How you prepare staff and students for internal programme review

The difference between programme monitoring and programme review

Your internal quality review cycle for higher education programmes and how this connects with programme monitoring and programme review

How students are involved in the programme monitoring and review processes

How the college's programme monitoring and review processes capture, and enable the sharing of, good practice

Case study

The Manchester College

Quality assurance is embedded throughout all levels of higher education at the Manchester College. Beginning at programme level, managers and the staff involved in delivery routinely review the effectiveness of programmes through the completion of the college's Programme Review Evaluation and Planning (PREP) report.

The PREP analyses programme data, learning and teaching, external examiners' reports, public information, quality assurance and assessment, student feedback, feedback from employers, and student progression and support data. From this, strengths are identified to inform sharing of good practice, and a detailed action plan for improvement is compiled.

The college undertook a review of the process two years ago as the previous PREP offered no opportunity for in-year analysis and improvement. Following consultation with programme teams, a review of the process of programme self-assessment led to a change from end-of-year completion to a three-phase review that enables ongoing changes throughout the year.

The revised PREP follows the student journey and has become a more appropriate working document for programme teams, ensuring a process of continuous self-assessment and in-year action for improvement.

The three phases of the annual monitoring review are linked closely to the student journey, with the first phase allied to a review of the enrolment and induction of students early in the academic year. The second phase takes place after the end of semester one and any mid-year Boards of Examiners, with the final phase at the end of the academic year. This allows systematic and continuous review of the programme but also enables academic staff to make and document in-year changes.

The current PREP structure is again being reviewed in consultation with academic staff to check if the process continues to be fit for purpose. This will also enable the Manchester College to assess the impact of the three-phase approach to monitoring and reviewing higher education programmes.

Higher Education Review



QAA regularly conducts reviews of UK higher education providers to ensure that they are meeting the Expectations set out in the Quality Code. Higher Education Review (HER) is QAA's principal review method for universities, colleges and alternative providers.

The aims of Higher Education Review

The overall aim of HER is to inform students and the wider public as to whether a provider meets the Expectations of the Quality Code. Its report structure mirrors that of the Quality Code, addressing each Expectation in turn.

*What is Higher Education Review?*²⁰ is an animation produced by QAA that helps you understand the HER method.

Scope and coverage

HER is concerned with programmes of study leading to awards at levels 4–8 of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and with Higher National Certificates and Higher National Diplomas at levels 4 and 5 respectively of the Qualifications and Credit Framework and/or the National Qualifications Framework. This includes foundation years and any Level 0 provision where it is funded by HEFCE.

During the HER, higher education providers are required to provide evidence that they are meeting the Quality Code's Expectations. They can do this by demonstrating that their organisational policies and processes for higher education provision and quality assurance are effective.

The evidence base for HER is a combination of information collected by QAA, information given by the college including the **self-evaluation document**, and information provided by students (the **student submission**).

The role of partnership agreements

For providers without degree-awarding powers, HER is concerned with the way in which these providers discharge their responsibilities within the context of their agreements with degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding organisations.

Providers without degree-awarding powers work with degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding organisations, such as Pearson, which retain responsibility for the academic standards of the awards granted in their names, and for ensuring that the quality of learning opportunities offered is adequate to enable students to achieve the academic standards required for their awards.

Some providers may have degree-awarding powers for certain levels of higher education, such as foundation degrees, but not for bachelor's and master's degrees. These providers will be reviewed as degree-awarding bodies for the awards that they make themselves and as non-degree-awarding bodies for the awards for which they operate as partner organisations for other awarding bodies.

²⁰ *What is Higher Education Review?* (animation): www.youtube.com/watch?v=LL1oyqVD9GQ

The role of degree-awarding bodies and other awarding organisations

The extent to which degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding organisations are involved in the review process is decided between the college and the degree-awarding bodies and/or organisation. Review teams will be pleased to meet with awarding body/organisation representatives during the review visit and may encourage them to attend particular meetings should they think this would help them understand college's responsibilities. However, it is up to the college and degree-awarding bodies and/or organisation to decide if this is necessary, since the focus of HER is on the delegated responsibilities of the college under review and not on how its awarding bodies and/or awarding organisation manage their responsibilities.

Colleges should keep their awarding bodies or awarding organisation informed of the progress of the review and make any requests for support.

Judgements and reference points

HER is carried out by peer reviewers, that is, staff and students from other providers. We ask review teams to make judgements on:

- the setting and/or maintenance of academic standards
- the quality of students' learning opportunities
- information about learning opportunities
- the enhancement of students' learning opportunities.

The judgements are made with reference to the 19 Expectations of the Quality Code. They represent the reasonable conclusions that a review team is able to come to within the scope of the review. The basis for the judgement under enhancement is the review team's assessment of whether and how deliberate steps are being taken at provider level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities.

Judgements in the above four areas are expressed as one of the following:

- commended (not applicable to the judgement on standards)
- meets UK expectations
- requires improvement to meet UK expectations or
- does not meet UK expectations.

Review judgements may be differentiated. This means that different judgements may apply, for example, to provision delivered wholly by the provider and that offered through arrangements with other organisations; or to undergraduate and postgraduate levels; or to the provision associated with different degree-awarding bodies or other awarding organisations.

The review team also identifies features of good practice, makes recommendations for actions to be taken, and affirms actions already in progress. The recommendations include an indication (timescale) reflecting the urgency with which the team thinks each should be addressed. The most urgent have a deadline of one month after publication of the review report. QAA expects providers to observe these deadlines when they develop their action plan after the review.

As well as making judgements and presenting key findings, HER includes a thematic element. This focuses on an area that has been chosen by the higher education sector as particularly worthy of further analysis or enhancement and is not subject to a judgement. Instead the review report contains a commentary on the theme.

HER culminates in the publication of a report containing the judgements, the key findings, and a commentary in relation to the relevant theme. The provider is obliged to produce an action plan in consultation with students, describing how it intends to respond to the findings.

The self-evaluation document

The self-evaluation document is produced by the college and submitted for the purposes of the review. It has three main functions:

- to give the review team an overview of the college, including its track record in managing quality and standards, and details of any relationships with degree-awarding bodies or other awarding organisations and of the external reference points (other than the Quality Code) that the provider is required to consider
- to describe to the review team the provider's approach to assuring the academic standards and quality of that provision
- to explain to the review team how the provider knows that their approach is effective in meeting the Expectations of the Quality Code (and other external reference points, where applicable), and how this could be further improved.

The self-evaluation document has both descriptive and evaluative purposes. It details how a reflective and self-critical higher education provider appraises how effectively it manages standards and quality by asking itself the following questions.

- What are we trying to do?
- Why are we doing it?
- How are we doing it?
- Why is that the best way to do it?
- How do we know it works?
- How can we improve it?

The answers to all of these questions must be linked to the Expectations of the Quality Code, against which the provision will be reviewed.

Format

The most useful format for the self-evaluation document is under the four judgement areas: setting and maintaining academic standards; assuring and enhancing academic quality; information about higher education provision, and quality enhancement. The first three have their own Parts of the Quality Code; there is more information about the fourth on page 20.

Colleges should bear in mind it is the 19 Expectations (seven in Part A, one per Chapter in Part B and one in Part C; see pages 3-4) that form the basis of judgements in each of the four areas (see [Annex](#)). Colleges should comment on each Expectation separately (where applicable within the context of their agreements with degree-awarding bodies or other awarding organisations).

The Expectations express the key principles that the higher education community has identified as essential for the assurance of academic standards and quality. They make clear what UK higher education providers are required to do, what they expect of themselves and each other, and what students and the general public can therefore expect of them.

Colleges are judged against how well they have demonstrated that they meet each Expectation. They are not judged against the Indicators of sound practice.

A convenient summary of each Expectation, and the introductory text that supports it, can be obtained from the QAA website where there is a feature called [Build Your Own Quality Code](#).²¹

The Indicators of sound practice, while useful in stimulating reflection, should not be the starting point for writing the self-evaluation.

21 Build Your Own Quality Code:
www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/build-your-own-quality-code-intro

Composition and content

The starting point for writing the self-evaluation is to consider the relevant Expectation. Colleges refer to the introductory paragraphs of each Chapter to facilitate understanding of the Expectation.

Example

Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education

The Expectation is as follows.

Recruitment, selection and admission policies and procedures adhere to the principles of fair admission. They are transparent, reliable, valid, inclusive and underpinned by appropriate organisational structures and processes. They support higher education colleges in the selection of students who are able to complete their programme.

The Expectation incorporates the principles of fair admission or ‘Schwarz principles’ first set in *Fair Admissions to Higher Education: Recommendations for Good Practice* (2004) (the Schwartz Report). The principles are embedded in the Expectation and are fundamental to the Chapter as a whole. The principles are that a fair admissions system should:

- be transparent
- reliably identify applicants’ potential
- use reliable and valid assessment methods
- minimise barriers for applicants
- be professional and underpinned by appropriate structures and processes.

Features of a fair admissions system to be demonstrated

Transparency

Admissions policies and procedures in place are clear and explicit and cover everything from initial enquiries through to formal application. The policy makes it clear whether additional assessments, for example in the form of interviews, auditions, tests, the submission of portfolios and so on form part of the application process, how they will be used, and how the outcomes feed into the selection process. Admissions policies include details about how the decision making process works, and the timescales for decisions. Clear information is available about how to appeal against decisions or complain about any stage of the process. The college makes it clear what fees cover and whether there are likely to be additional charges.

Identifying potential

Colleges are expected to identify and select applicants who are likely to be able to complete the programme, based on their achievements and a judgement of their potential. Colleges ensure that all staff (including those working outside the college, nationally or internationally) who engage with applicants and/or the application process have sufficient experience, have up-to-date knowledge, and are appropriately trained to carry out their respective roles in a professional manner.

Use of reliable and valid assessment methods

Colleges are expected to use assessment methods that are reliable and valid. Beyond standard entry requirements, clear and transparent policies are needed for the recognition of prior learning and to ensure that entry requirements are met.

Minimising barriers

Colleges make admissions policies, which should be available on request in different formats, clear and accessible to external audiences through their website. Colleges regularly review their application materials and processes to ensure they remain fit for purpose, that they do not unduly discriminate against any potential applicant groups and that any supporting information, advice and guidance required to complete a suitable application is reasonably accessible.



Professionalism and organisational structures to be demonstrated

The Expectation also sets out that appropriate organisational structures and processes underpin the principles.

Colleges' admissions processes and procedures are expected to be professional in every respect and underpinned by appropriate organisational structures and processes. They need to be applicable to all modes and levels of study, support staff professionalism and coherent practice across the college, and facilitate measuring and monitoring. They set out rules and regulations to which all staff involved in the application process adhere. They should be familiar to staff involved in recruitment, selection and admission, who should be fully briefed on the requirements of their role (this includes administrative as well as academic staff).

The introductory paragraph of the Chapter sets its scope and describes the activities that colleges undertake to put in place appropriate organisational structures and processes. For *Chapter B2*, this includes:

- recruitment activities that help prospective students make informed decisions
- policies and procedures that ensure the selection of suitably qualified applicants
- employ effective decision-making processes and communication methods
- support successful applicants in their transition to higher education.

Recruitment activities to inform students' choices

These activities help prospective students ascertain whether they wish to undertake study within higher education and, if so, where, how and what they might wish to study.

These 'activities' include all the information and events that prospective students can access to inform their decisions, along with a clear and transparent application process, including information found on the college websites, the college prospectus, promotional materials, programme pages, programme specification, open days, taster days and so on.

Policies and procedures to select suitably qualified applicants

These could include the rules and regulations that govern recruitment, selection and admission and to which staff adhere, the entry criteria and any staff training that enable staff to select suitable qualified applicants.

Decision-making processes and subsequent communication with applicants

Applicants are entitled to timely communications regarding the college's decision as to whether or not they have been successful. They should have access to an admissions appeals and complaints policy supported by a process that is easy to follow.

Supporting transition to higher education

Successful applicants are prepared in advance for the academic environment. Student expectations can be managed in a number of ways, from recruitment events to pre-arrival support material, and summer schools. Social media are becoming increasingly useful in this regard too.

How do the Indicators of sound practice help?

Expectations are the starting point for writing the self-evaluation document. In *Chapter B2* the principles follow the prospective student life cycle. This is reflected in the Indicators of sound practice, which may stimulate reflection on policies and processes, but are not mandatory.

In *Chapter B2*, the Indicators are organised under two headings. The first cluster describes an effective basis for recruitment, selection and admission and addresses the process as a whole; each indicator is applicable at every stage throughout the recruitment, selection and admission process. The second cluster deals with each stage of the process and follows the prospective student life cycle of: considering higher education, applying, going through the selection process, receiving the decision/feedback, and making the transition into higher education.

How is the self-evaluation document used?

The self-evaluation document is used throughout the review process. During the desk-based analysis it is part of the information base that helps to determine the duration of the review visit.

The reviewers will be looking for indications that:

- the college systematically monitors and reflects on the effectiveness of its engagement with the Quality Code
- monitoring and self-reflection use management information and comparisons against previous performance and national and international benchmarks, where available and applicable, which may include the National Student Survey, the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education survey, and data on non-continuation following year of entry, or retention rates²²
- monitoring and self-reflection is inclusive of student feedback (and feedback from third parties where relevant)
- monitoring and self-reflection leads to the identification of strengths and areas for improvement, and subsequently to changes in procedures and practices.



Additional resources and further references

Supplementary guidance on writing the self-evaluation document for Higher Education Review:

www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2772

This should be read in conjunction with *Higher Education Review:*

A Handbook for Providers and particularly Annex 3 of that handbook, which describes the role of the self-evaluation document, how it is used during review, what it should cover, and how it ought to be structured:

www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2672

Higher Education Review: Themes for 2013-15 and *Higher Education Review Themes for 2015-16* provide further guidance on what the self-evaluation document should cover in relation to the thematic element:

www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=106

www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2859

Student involvement

Students are among the main beneficiaries of HER and are at the heart of the review process. In every review there are many opportunities for students to inform and contribute to the review team's activities.

Membership of the review team

All review teams have at least one student reviewers as a full member of the team. Student reviewers are a key element in our aim to involve students more in quality assurance processes. Student reviewers ensure that the student experience is at the heart of the review process, as well as contributing to the team spirit and the general operation of the process. Further information about [student reviewers](#) is available on the website.²³

²² Derived from table series T3 of the Performance Indicators for Higher Education in the UK, published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency: www.hesa.ac.uk

²³ Student reviewers: www.qaa.ac.uk/partners/students/our-review-methods/student-reviewers

Student Engagement Adviser Scheme

The Student Engagement Adviser Scheme is designed to help improve student engagement in quality assurance through HER, with the ultimate aim of improving UK Higher Education. Student engagement advisers can support students, their representatives and unions, and support staff in:

- identifying and supporting the lead student representative
- producing the student submission
- getting involved in the team visit.

They can also work to engage the broader student population in review.²⁴

The student submission

For colleges going through a QAA review, the student submission is an opportunity for students to give the review team an impression of what it is like to study at that institution.

It also expresses how students' views are incorporated into the decision making and quality assurance processes of the college. The student submission is a key document to be considered during the review process.

The student submission is often a written document although it can be in alternative formats. It uses students' opinions, surveys and other feedback to discuss students' views on certain key areas, which are all detailed in the guidance below.

The lead student representative

Wherever possible there should be a lead student representative (LSR). This role places a student representative at the heart of the review process. The LSR might be:

- an officer from the students' union
- an appropriate member of a similar student representative body
- a student drawn from the college's established procedures for course representation.

Where there is no student representative body the college could ask for volunteers from within the student body to fill this role. The LSR role could be subject to a job-share or team effort, as long as it was clear who was the point of communication. Although a senior member of staff cannot be the LSR it is possible under some circumstances for students holding staffing positions to be the LSR, for example a postgraduate student who is engaged in small amounts of teaching.

The LSR is invited to a briefing event to enable them to:

- understand how HER operates
- understand their own role
- discuss and be fully aware of the review timeline and what they are required to do and when
- put their questions to QAA.

Colleges are expected to provide as much operational and logistical support to the LSR as is feasible, and, in particular, to ensure that any relevant information is shared with the LSR so that the student submission is well informed and evidence based.

The LSR would normally be responsible for:

- receiving copies of key correspondence from QAA
- organising or overseeing the development of the student submission
- helping the review team to select students to meet
- advising the review team during the review visit, on request
- attending the final review meeting

²⁴ QAA Student Engagement Adviser Scheme:
www.qaa.ac.uk/partners/students/student-engagement-at-qaq/student-engagement-advisers

- liaising internally with the facilitator to ensure smooth communication between the student body and the provider
- disseminating information about the review to the student body
- coordinating the students' comments on the draft review report
- coordinating the students' input into the provider's action plan.



Have you considered?

Giving the LSR access to the evidence supporting the college self-evaluation document

Sharing the self-evaluation document with the LSR

Copying the LSR into all correspondence with QAA

Allowing the LSR timetable access so that focus groups can be set up

Ensuring staff buy into the process and the role of the LSR?

Guidance for students preparing a student submission

Guidance on alternative student submissions in QAA reviews:

www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=220

Optional template for student submissions in QAA reviews:

www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=222

Thematic element guidance for authors of the student written submission:

Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement:

www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=121

What happens after the review visit?

Publication of reports and action plans

HER culminates in the publication of a report, which sets out the review's findings (judgements, features of good practice, recommendations, and affirmations). Reports are published on QAA's public website and provide a rich understanding of today's diverse and differentiated higher education sector. Each review report offers both the individual provider and the higher education sector in general the opportunity to learn from the outcomes.

After the report has been published colleges publish an action plan responding to the recommendations and affirmations and giving any plans to capitalise on the identified good practice. This is the provider's public commitment to take forward the outcomes of the

review, and to enhance the student learning experience while disseminating good practice. This should be produced jointly with student representatives, or representatives should be able to post their own commentary on the action plan. Colleges are expected to update their action plan on an annual basis, again in conjunction with student representatives, until all actions have been completed. The updated plan should be posted to the college website.

How good practice is shared through review

Knowledgebases

The features of good practice, recommendations and affirmations identified through QAA reviews of higher education institutions and further education providers feed into three [Knowledgebases](#).²⁵

These can be searched by selecting any or all three Knowledgebases: Good Practice; Recommendations; Affirmations; and applying filters to the search that includes: publication date; one of six themes, which include working with employers, equality and diversity, enhancement, staff development, postgraduate experience and internationalisation; chapters of the Quality Code; or by using a key word search.

Good practice identified through methods that operated prior to 2014 are categorised where appropriate by themes relating to the learner journey. Colleges can also choose to include the results Welsh reviews as part of their search.

Thematic element

HER, as well as providing judgements about providers includes a thematic element. The thematic element focuses on an area which is regarded as particularly worthy of further analysis or enhancement among providers under review and/or the higher education sector more generally. The theme is not subject to a judgement. Instead the review report contains a commentary on the theme.

Investigating a theme is intended to produce useful and timely good practice guidance to the higher education sector. Reviewers, informed by the self-evaluation document and the student submission gain an understanding of the provider's approach to the thematic element through the normal schedule of meetings and through reading of institutional documentation.

Overview reports

On a periodic basis, QAA publishes reports that provide an overview of emerging practice in relation to the thematic element. These reports look at a range of practices that have been identified through an analysis of individual review reports and a sample of self-evaluation documents submitted by providers for their review to analyse the thematic element of HER. They provide an overview that will be useful to the wider higher education sector in future planning of the student experience

Good practice case studies

QAA also publishes [good practice case studies](#) identified QAA through review of higher education providers.

Key findings reports

The QAA, on a periodic basis, also publishes reports summarising the key findings and judgements of reviews.

²⁵ QAA Knowledgebases and good practice case studies:
www.qaa.ac.uk/improving-higher-education/knowledgebase-search

Annex:
The Parts,
Chapters
and 19
Expectations

A Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards

Chapter A1: UK and European Reference Points for Academic Standards

Expectation A1

In order to secure threshold academic standards, degree-awarding bodies:

a) ensure that the requirements of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland/The Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland* are met by:

- positioning their qualifications at the appropriate level of the relevant framework for higher education qualifications
- ensuring that programme learning outcomes align with the relevant qualification descriptor in the relevant framework for higher education qualifications
- naming qualifications in accordance with the titling conventions specified in the frameworks for higher education qualifications
- awarding qualifications to mark the achievement of positively defined programme learning outcomes

b) consider and take account of QAA's guidance on qualification characteristics

c) where they award UK credit, assign credit values and design programmes that align with the specifications of the relevant national credit framework.

d) consider and take account of relevant subject benchmark statements.

Chapter A2: Degree-Awarding Bodies' Reference Points for Academic Standards

Expectation A2.1

In order to secure their academic standards, degree-awarding bodies establish transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations to govern how they award academic credit and qualifications.

Expectation A2.2

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.

Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards

Expectation A3.1

Degree-awarding bodies establish and consistently implement processes for the approval of taught programmes and research degrees that ensure that academic standards are set at a level which meets the UK threshold standard for the qualification and are in accordance with their own academic frameworks and regulations.

Expectation A3.2

Degree-awarding bodies ensure that credit and qualifications are awarded 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
- both the UK threshold standards and the academic standards of the relevant degree-awarding body have been satisfied.

Expectation A3.3

Degree-awarding bodies ensure that processes for the monitoring and review of programmes are implemented which explicitly address whether the UK threshold academic standards are achieved and whether the academic standards required by the individual degree-awarding body are being maintained.

Expectation A3.4

In order to be transparent and publicly accountable, degree-awarding bodies use external and independent expertise at key stages of setting and maintaining academic standards to advise on whether

- UK threshold academic standards are set, delivered and achieved
- the academic standards of the degree-awarding body are appropriately set and maintained.

B Part B: Assuring and Enhancing Academic Quality

Chapter B1: Programme Design, Development and Approval

Expectation B1

Higher education providers, in discharging their responsibilities for setting and maintaining academic standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, operate effective processes for the design, development and approval of programmes.

Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education

Expectation B2

Recruitment, selection, and admission policies and procedures adhere to the principles of fair admission. They are transparent, reliable, valid, inclusive and underpinned by appropriate organisational structures and processes. They support higher education providers in the selection of students who are able to complete their programme.

Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching

Expectation B3

Higher education providers, working with their staff, students and other stakeholders, articulate and systematically review and enhance the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices, so that every student is enabled to develop as an independent learner, study their chosen subject(s) in depth and enhance their capacity for analytical, critical and creative thinking.

Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement

Expectation B4

Higher education providers have in place, monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential.

Chapter B5: Student Engagement

Expectation B5

Higher education providers take deliberate steps to engage all students, individually and collectively, as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience.

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

Expectation B6

Higher education providers operate equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment, including for the recognition of prior learning, which enable every student to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the credit or qualification being sought.

Chapter B7: External Examining

Expectation B7

Higher education providers make scrupulous use of external examiners.

Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review

Expectation B8

Higher education providers, in discharging their responsibilities for setting and maintaining academic standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, operate effective, regular and systematic processes for monitoring and for review of programmes.

Chapter B9: Academic Appeals and Student Complaints

Expectation B9

Higher education providers have procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints about the quality of learning opportunities; these procedures are fair, accessible and timely, and enable enhancement.

Chapter B10: Managing Higher Education Provision with Others

Expectation B10

Degree-awarding bodies take ultimate responsibility for academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities, irrespective of where these are delivered or who provides them. Arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with organisations other than the degree-awarding body are implemented securely and managed effectively.

Chapter B11: Research Degrees

Expectation B11

Research degrees are awarded in a research environment that provides secure academic standards for doing research and learning about research approaches, methods, procedures and protocols. This environment offers students quality of opportunities and the support they need to achieve successful academic, personal and professional outcomes from their research degrees.

C Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

Expectation C

Higher education providers produce information for their intended audiences about the learning opportunities they offer that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

Contact us



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