



# Quality Code Enhancement Project

## Case studies

## Introduction

The Quality Code Enhancement Project has been set up to capture and explore examples of how universities and colleges are enhancing the quality of their provision, supported by the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code).

It explores the innovative ways in which the principles that the Quality Code sets out are put into practice by higher education providers, to assure and systematically improve the quality of the learning opportunities that they offer.

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# 1 Birmingham City University - Raising awareness of the Quality Code to support enhancement

The Quality Code requires providers to engage students, as partners, in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. It encourages frequent and meaningful professional conversations between students and staff. Birmingham City University (BCU) drives partnership working between staff and students through their Student Academic Partners (SAP) and Student Academic Mentors (StAMP) programmes. These put students at the heart of programme design and delivery while also helping them to develop their academic and employability skills.

## What Birmingham City University does

BCU has a vision to create a greater sense of learning community. The way in which this vision has been achieved has evolved over time, but it is founded upon a belief that students and staff should work together to identify opportunities and create solutions that improve the quality of the student learning experience.

Partnership working at BCU is currently driven through two student engagement programmes: SAP (led by the Students' Union) and StAMP (led by the Centre for Enhancement of Learning and Teaching). The philosophy underpinning SAP and StAMP is that they should demonstrate meaningful partnership, have an impact on the learning community, and put students at the heart of design and delivery. Activities that have a positive impact on the student experience are encouraged to be proactively disseminated across the university and to other institutions.

SAP projects conducted over the last eight years have typically centred around four main themes:

- development of new content (learning, resources, assessment approaches, curriculum focus)
- consultation and communication (surveys, networking projects, community building, student engagement focus)
- employability (employment, professional practice and placement experience)
- thematic (progression, retention, first-year experience, internationalisation).

In 2015-16, 107 projects that seek to create this greater sense of community have been supported under the student engagement programme. This has resulted in enhancement initiatives taking place across BCU, which are brought together through Learning Labs, a supportive environment in which students and staff can share their progress and challenges as they seek to innovate and improve around the student experience.

From an institutional point of view, these projects enable curriculum and extracurricular activities to be made more current and relevant for students. BCU gains fresh perspectives and is able to involve students directly in shaping both theirs and the future student experience. The 400+ students that participate in SAP or StAMP projects every year benefit from a new type of relationship with staff, but also from the development of employability skills for their future.

As one student commented: 'Academically, talking to students throughout this project has helped me build up my confidence. I took that confidence and transferred it to my final two projects for my undergraduate course. Staff throughout the department commented on how I was now presenting my work with a lot more confidence, something I put down to this

project...To me this meant that the university actually appreciates the work we're doing and wants to listen to what we learnt here.'

More details about these projects, including contact information, can be found [here](#).<sup>1</sup>

## **What the Quality Code says**

### ***Chapter B5: Student Engagement***

#### **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.

#### **Indicator 2**

Higher education providers create and maintain an environment within which students and staff engage in discussions that aim to bring about demonstrable enhancement of the educational experience.

#### **Additional explanation**

While it is the responsibility of the higher education providers to provide opportunities for students to engage in quality systems, they also have a responsibility shared with their staff and, where one exists, the student representative organisation, to create an environment that proactively encourages students to engage fully. In fostering effective partnership working, higher education providers encourage frequent and meaningful professional conversations between students and staff. This environment is sensitive to, and reflects, the diverse nature of the student body of the higher education provider.

## **Some questions to consider when addressing your practice**

- 1        What do we do to engage students in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience?
- 2        Are students engaged as partners in our organisation?
- 3        How do we encourage meaningful conversations between students and staff?

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<sup>1</sup> Student Engagement at Birmingham City University, available at: [www.bcu.ac.uk/about-us/celt/student-engagement](http://www.bcu.ac.uk/about-us/celt/student-engagement).

## 2 University of Bedfordshire - Risk assessment tool for working with others

The Quality Code highlights the importance of proportionate risk assessment and due diligence when working with others. The University of Bedfordshire risk assessment tool is a user friendly form, which makes it possible to carry out a thorough and objective risk assessment in a straightforward manner. The outcomes feed into the due diligence process, which helps to ensure that the University gives due consideration to all the necessary areas when considering a new partnership. The use of consistent and easy-to-use forms helps to make the ongoing monitoring of risk more effective.

### What the University of Bedfordshire does

The University of Bedfordshire has a long-standing commitment to partnership working, in the UK and overseas, and building on existing strengths in partnership and collaborative working is a current strategic aim of the University. With a view to establishing new partnerships, the University decided to review whether its processes for initial assessment of the risks involved in an arrangement, and then for ongoing monitoring, were appropriate. In carrying out this review, the University has reflected on the lessons learnt from its withdrawal from one particular, relatively new, partnership, which had been necessitated by sudden and irretrievable political challenges.

As a result of its review, the University (through the Quality and Standards Unit) made the following changes to its quality assurance processes.

- The creation of an initial risk assessment tool and supporting due diligence template, aimed at ensuring these processes were carried out thoroughly and robustly, but also as simply as possible:
  - the risk assessment tool is made up of a series of multiple choice questions, where each answer is pre-allocated a risk score
  - the questions are factual, which means that risks assessments are consistent and do not require subjective judgement at this stage
  - high scores are flagged for additional attention in the due diligence enquiries.
- The enhancement of the process of initial approval of partnerships, through the specification of required lines of questioning, to elicit any previously unidentified risk factors.
- Following approval of a new partnership the account manager appointed to oversee the relationship is required to monitor the risk levels associated with the collaboration through the use of a newly created risk management tool, ensuring that the University is informed of changes to risk following the initial assessment.

These templates and processes are contained in the University's [Quality Handbook](#).<sup>2</sup>

The introduction of the initial risk assessment tool has improved the consistency of the information available to the University to inform initial decisions about whether to proceed with a new partnership. The tool has helped the University to identify at an early stage partnerships that pose too high a risk, but also gives reassurance where resources are committed to taking a new arrangement forward.

Ongoing monitoring of risk has also become more thorough, as a result of having an easy-to-use management tool and clarified responsibilities for doing so. The regular reports to the relevant partnerships committees, which enable the University to maintain oversight of

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<sup>2</sup> University of Bedfordshire Quality Handbook, available at: [www.beds.ac.uk/about-us/our-university/quality/collaborative-partners](http://www.beds.ac.uk/about-us/our-university/quality/collaborative-partners).

its arrangements, have also been enhanced by the introduction of a consistent format. The University is investigating the possibility of moving to electronic versions of quality assurance documentation, which will make consideration and approval even easier and remove the need to use hard copies for circulation.

'The comprehensive arrangements in place to support collaborative partnerships, including clear governance and the effective support provided by Account Managers and Link Co-ordinators' was identified as a feature of good practice in the University's [Higher Education Review](#) in March 2015.<sup>3</sup>

## **What the Quality Code says**

### ***Chapter B10: Managing Higher Education Provision with Others***

#### **Indicator 5**

The risks of each arrangement to deliver learning opportunities with others are assessed at the outset and reviewed subsequently on a periodic basis. Appropriate and proportionate safeguards to manage the risks of the various arrangements are determined and put in place.

#### **Indicator 6**

Appropriate and proportionate due diligence procedures are determined for each proposed arrangement for delivering learning opportunities with an organisation other than the degree-awarding body. They are conducted periodically to check the capacity of the other organisation to continue to fulfil its designated role in the arrangement.

#### **Additional explanation**

Staff need to be resourced in terms of both time and skills to assess and manage risk effectively.

Risks to be assessed may be financial, legal, academic or reputational, and take into account the extent to which it will be necessary to build a shared understanding of the ethos, values, culture, requirements and standards of UK higher education.

Due diligence is related to the process of risk assessment: the nature of enquiries is proportionate to the type of arrangement being considered, such as the extent to which the degree-awarding body is involved in the delivery of provision, and the type and geographical location of the other organisation(s) involved.

Management of risk is an ongoing process, and strong communication with the organisations with which it works helps a degree-awarding body identify where changes to legislative or regulatory frameworks, for example, mean that the risk assessment should be revisited; similarly, due diligence is regularly refreshed to ensure it takes account of any changes.

Degree-awarding bodies have a responsibility to students studying for their awards, and therefore the process of risk assessment takes into account the steps that might need to be taken should an arrangement run into difficulties in order that students are not disadvantaged.

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<sup>3</sup> QAA Higher Education Review of the University of Bedfordshire, available at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/provider?UKPRN=10007152](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/provider?UKPRN=10007152).

## **Some questions to consider when addressing your practice**

- 1 Do our staff have appropriate knowledge and skills to carry out robust risk assessments of potential arrangements to work with others?
- 2 How do we make sure our due diligence enquiries are proportionate: robust enough to identify any potential problems but not over burdensome where the risks are low?
- 3 Do we have the right tools in place to manage risk effectively on an operational basis?

### **3 BPP University - Strategic approach to digital literacy**

The Quality Code makes clear the need for providers to make appropriate arrangements to enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. It recommends taking a strategic approach to these arrangements, reviewing them regularly to ensure that they are appropriate and successful. The BPP University Learning, Teaching and Assessment Enhancement Committee commissioned a cross-University review of digital literacy to look at how best to support the development of students' skills in this area. The outcomes of the review led to a number of enhancement initiatives that have benefitted staff and students.

#### **What BPP University does**

In January 2016 the BPP University Learning, Teaching and Assessment Enhancement Committee commissioned a cross-University review of digital literacy, in order to prepare for the thematic component of a forthcoming QAA review. The objectives of this review were to:

- define the key digital literacies employers expect to see in BPP University graduate recruits and discover any significant gaps between employers' expectations and actual capabilities
- review the current situation at BPP University
- provide recommendations to improve BPP University's position on digital literacy support in 2015-16.

BPP University approached the review in a way that was intended to be both collegiate and consultative, driven and owned by University staff and students. The process focused on improving the student learning experience, by sharing innovative practice and ultimately improving higher level employability skills in a digital economy.

Nominated digital representatives from across BPP University, including the schools, Student Association and operational departments such as the library and IT made up the multidisciplinary project team. They carried out research into how leadership communicated a commitment to digital literacy, and how this was embedded into the curriculum to ensure programmes reflected the University's strategic position. A definition of digital literacy was adopted and recommendations for a strategic University-wide approach to digital literacy enhancement were made.

The review resulted in the establishment of an annual digital literacy conference for all students and staff, focusing on three main academic streams: Business, Law and Health. In addition, trained student digital champions run workshops through the academic year, and students leave with the Microsoft Office Specialist Certification on their CVs. This gives all students equal opportunity to develop their digital literacy skills, and supports improved opportunity to achieve learning outcomes and improved employment opportunities. Horizon scanning for changes in digital technologies and the demands of employers is carried out regularly, informing the training provided. The responsibility for these enhancements remains with the cross-University multidisciplinary team representing both staff and students.

This strategic approach to digital literacy in learning and teaching has resulted in the incorporation of digital literacy into the validation process in 2017. Key student digital literacy levels of achievement by programme will now be identified and the reporting process for module leaders and head of programmes will enable BPP University to monitor the effectiveness of in-programme enhancement. A forum for staff has been created to



disseminate good practice, which, along with the conference, provides training and has contributed to the development of a culture of innovation and technical practice across the organisation.

## **What the Quality Code says**

### ***Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement***

#### **Expectation**

Higher education providers have in place, monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential.

#### **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.

#### **Additional explanation**

Effective approaches to enabling student development and achievement are likely to entail involvement from many different staff and departments within the higher education provider.

The Quality Code, *Chapter B4* stresses the importance of integration, coherence and internal cooperation between different areas as part of a provider's commitment to enabling students to achieve their learning objectives and to develop more broadly as a result of the opportunities offered by higher education. This is reflected in the organisational strategies of providers and includes links between professional services, academic departments, and student representative bodies, as well as with external organisations. Students are effectively informed about the opportunities available and how and where they can access them.

## **Some questions to consider when addressing your practice**

- 1 How do we support the development of digital literacy (for staff and students) in our organisation?
- 2 Do we take a strategic approach to all aspects of enabling student development and achievement?
- 3 How could we bring staff and students together to enhance the ways in which we enable student development and achievement?

## 4 Great Yarmouth College - Developing staff understanding of 'levelness'

*The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)* sets out what students should know and be able to do to gain qualifications at different levels as they progress through higher education. Great Yarmouth College worked with its staff to develop their understanding of the characteristics that students should be able to demonstrate at different stages of their programme. By setting this in the context of the chapters of the Quality Code about learning, teaching and assessment, staff engaged with the technical detail by relating it to their practice, and understand how the expectations of higher education differ from those of further education.

### What Great Yarmouth College does

Great Yarmouth College is one of five satellite centres delivering higher education as part of the University Campus Suffolk network (which will become the University of Suffolk from 1 August 2016). The College identified that there had been a turnover in its academic staff since its previous external engagement with QAA in 2012, and at the same time there had been a significant change in the national reference points for quality and standards, with the transition from the Academic Infrastructure to the Quality Code. The College therefore designed a short series of staff development sessions to help staff understand what is expected of learning and teaching in higher education. These sessions also enabled the College to address a weakness identified in its Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review about responding to feedback from external examiners on whether student achievement was set at the right level.

The workshops explored the concept of 'levelness', using detailed analysis of the qualification descriptors in the FHEQ to demonstrate how what a student is expected to know and be able to do becomes more demanding as they progress through their higher education learning experience. The qualification descriptors for levels 4, 5 and 6 were broken down into a number of key areas: knowledge, context, communication, skills, problem solving, evaluation and analysis, research and self-management, to illustrate how the requirements change. The session stressed that student learning should be seen as 'a planned journey of increasing depth, scope and self-management', characterising the levels in broad terms in the following ways.

- **Level 4:** a chance to get all students to the same place, recognising that they will have a range of educational backgrounds - to put the basics in place, so that students have the skills they need to progress.
- **Level 5:** enabling students to move towards being autonomous learners by recognising the limits of their knowledge, and by developing transferable skills such as self-management.
- **Level 6:** students should have 'learnt how to learn', and the role of staff becomes one of supervisor rather than teacher.

This examination of the descriptors was reinforced by a straightforward exercise: taking a typical student assessment task and comparing what would be expected of students completing it at different levels.

As staff at the College spend much of their time teaching in further education, it was important for the workshops to emphasise the different expectations of higher education and how they might be reflected in their practice. This provided a context for the examination of the qualification descriptors and helped staff translate the technical detail into a practical understanding of what they might do differently. In particular, staff considered the growing

independence of students as learners and how the support they need would change as they progressed.

The College has used the staff session to design an induction programme for students that looks at the qualification descriptors in a student-friendly way. As many of the higher education students have progressed from further education programmes at the College, there is a particular need to ensure that they understand how the expectations of them have changed. This is reinforced by exercises that enable students to practice critical thinking, reflection and academic writing. Feedback indicates that this has helped students in adjusting.

## **What the Quality Code says**

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

Each of the two UK frameworks for higher education qualifications has a number of different stages known as framework levels. These reflect distinct levels of intellectual achievement (paragraph 2.12).

[Framework levels] define the outcomes of progressively more challenging learning (and typical qualifications) in ascending order (paragraph 3.1).

Degree-awarding bodies ensure that the design of programmes facilitates academic and intellectual progression (paragraph 6.6).

### **Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards**

Delivery organisations working with degree-awarding bodies do not carry the same responsibilities [as degree-awarding bodies] for academic standards but need to understand how academic standards are set and maintained in UK higher education.

#### **Additional explanation**

*The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies* contain a number of qualification descriptors, which describe what a student gaining a typical qualification at each level should know and be able to do; these descriptors reflect a continuum of learning through which a student can progress.

Where programmes leading to higher education qualifications are taken over a number of years, students undertake learning that becomes progressively more challenging and reflects the learning outcomes described in the qualification descriptors at a series of ascending levels.

The fundamental premise of the UK qualifications frameworks is that qualifications are awarded for achievement of learning outcomes, demonstrated through assessment, rather than for duration of study.

## **Some questions to consider when addressing your practice**

- 1 How do we articulate the differences in what students are expected to know and be able to do as they progress through their higher education learning experience?
- 2 How do our teaching practices change as students become more independent as learners?

## 5 Highbury College Portsmouth - Promoting employability through Mock Assessment Centres

The Quality Code advises providers to work in partnership with students and external stakeholders to develop strategies that promote students' employability. Highbury College Portsmouth collaborates with employers and the Local Enterprise Partnership to deliver mock assessments, which provide valuable learning opportunities for students and constructive feedback from real employers.

### What Highbury College Portsmouth does

Highbury College Portsmouth offers full-time foundation degrees alongside part-time Higher National Certificates and Diplomas (HNC/Ds). The majority of HNC and HND students are in employment and studying part time to gain new knowledge and skills to enhance their career prospects. In contrast, most foundation degree students have more limited employment experience and need more support to develop the personal and professional skills needed to succeed in the modern workplace.

Consultation with local employers and a review of Solent Local Enterprise Partnership publications and priorities identified a mismatch between employers' needs and students' skills and expectations, particularly in terms of:

- personal and professional skills
- students' expectations of interviews and assessment practices
- students' expectations of what employers are looking for from graduates.

The Mock Assessment Centre process is designed to address this mismatch, by providing opportunities for students to experience the assessment process, and to receive constructive feedback from real employers.

At the beginning of the project, the Employment Services team made contact with large local companies, and small and medium-sized enterprises, to identify their expectations of graduates seeking employment. It then collaborated with these organisations to develop a dedicated assessment day for second-year higher education students on full-time programmes. The first Mock Assessment Centre took place in 2013.

The Mock Assessment Centre format includes:

- individual assessment - numeracy and literacy tests, later replaced by psychometric tests to align with industry employment practice
- group problem-solving exercises - students are assessed by the employers on their team working, interpersonal skills, time management and leadership qualities
- one-to-one interviews - students are assessed and provided with guidance on how to improve future interview performance and their chance of securing a job offer.

Students who have taken part in the assessments have found it useful to have feedback directly from employers on what they are looking for and how they judge candidates.

Other positive outcomes from the project have included:

- feedback from employers, enabling the Employment Services team to identify and work with programme teams to address common skills gaps for students (including offering CV-writing workshops in dedicated tutorial sessions)
- College teams working together to help all students see the value of investing time in the process to increase their chances of securing graduate employment

- employer support leading to the introduction of a Graduate Careers Fair held on the same day as the Mock Assessment Centre.

## **What the Quality Code says**

### ***Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement***

#### **Indicator 5**

To enable student development and achievement, higher education providers put in place policies, practices and systems that facilitate successful transitions and academic progression.

#### **Indicator 6**

Higher education providers ensure all students have opportunities to develop skills that enable their academic, personal and professional progression.

#### **Additional explanation**

All students should be provided with opportunities that enable them to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. Providers put in place policies and practices that facilitate the various transitions, including into employment, which students need to make to succeed.

The systems that enable students' academic progression through the development of appropriate academic skills such as reasoning, research, numeracy, writing and referencing, are implemented through a partnership between students and staff, including professional staff, careers and employability specialists, and academic departments.

Higher education providers also consider how they can best facilitate inclusive interaction with employers to inform career planning while also enabling the development of a range of skills.

## **Some questions to consider when addressing your practice**

- 1 Do we have a strategic approach to employer engagement that enhances and supports student employability?
- 2 How do we embed employability in the curriculum?
- 3 How do we identify skills gaps and support students in developing appropriate skills to prepare them for their transition into employment?

## 6 University of Huddersfield - Employability curriculum development workshops

The Quality Code requires providers to regularly monitor and review their programmes, to ensure that these continue to be current and valid. It also asks providers to consider the employability of students across everything that they do. The University of Huddersfield developed the D4 (Discover, Dream, Design, Deliver) Employability Curriculum Design Workshops as part of its review process to help course teams identify ways of improving their curriculum. Employability is one of four topics covered by these workshops.

### What University of Huddersfield does

The University of Huddersfield developed the D4 Employability Curriculum Design Workshops to help academics embed employability into the curriculum. All D4 workshops are linked to the University's key performance indicators, and this particular initiative supports the University's growing priority of helping graduates to develop skills that will enable them to secure high status graduate employment. The University has found that addressing this priority often involves making the implicit explicit, rather than introducing employability skills as an additional burden into a curriculum that may already have a lot of content and professional, statutory and regulatory body (PRSB) requirements.

The workshop is designed around an appreciative inquiry model of change management that frames change in a positive way using a four stage process: Discover, Dream, Design, Deliver (Fifolt & Lander 2013).

All D4 workshops have a time-efficient starting point for the discussion, providing teams with tools to use as part of the ongoing process of curriculum review. They are team based in order to stimulate conversations about issues that are cross curricula. They are also:

- positively framed (based on the appreciative inquiry approach)
- practical and experiential (workshops are focused on four tasks relating to the Discover, Dream, Design, Deliver stages of the appreciative inquiry model)
- action orientated (the deliver stage is about action planning).

For the purpose of the employability workshop, employability skills are organised into seven groups (Leadership and Initiative, Personal Qualities, Communication, Problem Solving, Digital Identity, Planning and Organisation, and Teamwork), making them clearer and simpler for course teams to work with.

The third workshop task involves mapping the whole curriculum using seven colour coded cards relating to these groups. By examining how students' skills and knowledge are being developed across the whole programme, the course team can consider students' learning holistically. This critical review helps teams to identify any omissions, or repetitions, and leads onto action planning for curriculum improvement. The reverse sides of the seven cards offer practical techniques for addressing the employability skills that course teams can consider.

The D4 Employability Curriculum Design Workshops resources can be found [here](#).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> University of Huddersfield D4 Employability Curriculum Design Workshops, available at: <http://ipark.hud.ac.uk/content/d4-employability-workshop>.

## What the Quality Code says

### ***Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review***

#### **Expectation**

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.

#### **Indicator 1**

Higher education providers maintain strategic oversight of the processes for, and outcomes of, programme monitoring and programme review to ensure processes are applied systematically and operated consistently.

#### **Indicator 8**

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

#### **Additional explanation**

Providers enable those with responsibility for programme design, monitoring and review to consider strategic priorities. A strategic approach embraces differences between academic subjects and modes, levels and location of study. As programme design, development and approval forms part of a higher education provider's strategic and academic resources planning, within the context of its portfolio, including any learning opportunities delivered by others, so programme monitoring and review enables providers to monitor and review all the ways in which a programme is experienced by students.

### **Some questions to consider when addressing your practice**

- 1 How do your monitoring and review processes promote enhancement?
- 2 How are course teams supported to come together to frame change in a positive way?
- 3 How can employability skills be developed holistically, such as across the whole programme?

## 7 ICS Learn - Using the Quality Code beyond higher education

The Quality Code sets out key principles that are designed to be interpreted locally as appropriate to a provider's mission and values. As such, it can meet the needs of a wide range of providers. ICS Learn, a private provider of online professional courses, GCSEs and A Levels, has used the Quality Code as a benchmark for national educational quality and enhancement. Key elements of the Quality Code have informed the development of ICS Learn's own Quality Assurance and Enhancement Framework, which it uses to check the quality of learning programmes and services, and identify areas where improvements are required.

### What ICS Learn does

ICS Learn is a distance learning provider, which offers courses including professional and vocational qualifications as well as GCSEs and A Levels. It works with a number of awarding bodies across the UK to deliver these qualifications.

ICS Learn does not currently offer degree programmes and therefore is not a QAA subscriber. However, it has found the Quality Code relevant and useful in the formation of a company-wide Quality Assurance and Enhancement Framework. This Framework was developed by drawing on several chapters of the Quality Code, Part B: Assuring and Enhancing Academic Quality (*Chapters B1, B2, B3, B5, B8 and B9*), and Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision to produce a set of internal expectations for quality standards that are linked to the stages of the student journey.

These expectations are underpinned by quality indicators that define how well the expectations are achieved. The Framework also includes details of the departments and people responsible for maintaining quality standards, and how and when these will be checked.

To develop the Framework, the Quality Enhancement and Performance Team conducted extensive research into various quality frameworks across the UK, including the Quality Code. This led to the development of a first proposal for the Framework and the main areas it should cover. The Team then organised consultation workshops with the departments that were either directly responsible for, or expected to contribute, to the expectations. Through these workshops the Framework was tailored to the specific needs and requirements of each department. The workshops also served to raise awareness of quality assurance and enhancement across the organisation.

Through the Framework, ICS Learn has ensured that the student voice is captured at key stages in order to inform the enhancement processes. There are requirements to use learner analytics to inform the development and design of learning programmes, student feedback during the annual monitoring and programme enhancement processes, and for the continuous use of progression data to inform overall development.

ICS Learn is in the early stages of embedding the Framework into its day-to-day processes and procedures. Its overall objective is for the quality expectations to improve the programmes and services offered to students, and to support an iterative process in which continuous enhancement can take place.



## **What the Quality Code says**

### **General introduction**

The Quality Code provides consistent principles and practices and a common vocabulary for the management of academic standards and quality. It can be interpreted locally as appropriate to individual higher education providers' missions.

### ***Chapter B1: Programme Design, Development and Approval***

#### **Expectation**

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 B5: Student Engagement***

#### **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 B8: Programme Monitoring and Review***

#### **Expectation**

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.

## **Some questions to consider when addressing your practice**

- 1 How do we interpret the Quality Code locally to support our mission and values?
- 2 Who knows about the Quality Code in our organisation, and who needs to know about it?
- 3 How do we capture the student voice and what do we do to respond to it?

## 8 Leeds Trinity University - A university-wide approach to enhancing placement and employability skills provision

The Quality Code requires providers to have in place arrangements to enable students to achieve their personal and professional potential, as well as their academic potential. It recommends ongoing review of these arrangements to promote continuous improvement, including gathering feedback from employers offering placements to contribute to evaluation and monitoring processes. Leeds Trinity University's approach to employability and student placement is kept under continuous and rigorous review to keep pace with the demands of employers, to build the skills required into the curriculum, and to prepare students with the knowledge and confidence they need to make an impact in the workplace.

### What Leeds Trinity University does

Leeds Trinity University includes compulsory professional work placements as part of all of its degree programmes. It works with more than 2,000 businesses across all sectors, regionally and nationally, to deliver more than 1,200 placements each year. It provides the opportunity for students to undertake two placements (five weeks in level 4 and six weeks in level 5) as part of credit-bearing modules embedded in their degree. Students can build on this by selecting a final year consultancy-style module 'Professional Learning Through Work'. The scheme is highly successful, with 63 per cent of students receiving further work experience or paid work as a result of their placements.

As preparation for its Higher Education Review, Leeds Trinity University decided to review its approach to employability and took extensive feedback from students and placement providers. This revealed that employers wanted more sector and organisation research by students prior to placements, more active contributions from students, and improved communication skills. Students wanted confidence development, the opportunity to 'test' workplace tasks at university, feedback following the placement, and professional skills development.

The University used this feedback to shape an institution-wide conference-style event for level 4 students that took place over two weeks. Through a series of externally delivered activities, designed to address all of the feedback, students were provided with an intensive and immersive preparation block prior to their first professional placement. During this event, more than 850 students were given access to the following.

- An Employer Challenge Day - students worked in groups on a live brief relevant to the sector they will go on placement in, and presented their findings to employers. Some employers went on to publish/use the work produced by students.
- A Placement Kickstarter Conference Day - students worked in groups on creative activities, identifying specific values they could take to their placements and developing skills to present with confidence. Level 5 students worked as Peer Facilitators during the conference and break out activities.
- A Self Awareness Workshop - this helped students to understand their own personality preferences, what this means in practice and how they may work with others.
- Professional Workshops and Presentations - students chose three workshops from a range of sessions based on the professional skills required by employers for placements and jobs, including writing for the web, social media for business, and project management. Some workshops were more inspirational and addressed personal development such as confidence, resilience and mental well-being.

All workshops and sessions were delivered by professionals or employment specialists. Level 5 students were involved as Peer Facilitators, giving them the opportunity to develop facilitation, planning and organisational skills, and confidence. Students worked on live employer problems and challenges, and received direct feedback on their performance. The programme was cross disciplinary, ensuring a mix of students and skillsets.

The University intends to undertake staged evaluations post placement and after six months in order to gauge the full impact of the programme.

## **What the Quality Code says**

### ***Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement***

#### **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.

#### **Indicator 6**

Higher education providers ensure all students have opportunities to develop skills that enable their academic, personal and professional progression.

#### **Additional explanation**

There are clear and explicit links between employer engagement, the enhancement of teaching and learning, and students' employability. Engagement with employers as part of the design and delivery of the curriculum is considered central to enhancing and supporting student employability and workforce development, through the creation of graduates with the appropriate skills, knowledge and expertise required by employers. Input from industry and employers is central to ensuring not only that providers are delivering programmes to meet needs and demand, but also that higher education programmes remain relevant and valid.

## **Some questions to consider when addressing your practice**

- 1 Do employers contribute to the development of work-related (real-world) assessments and projects?
- 2 Are employers involved in programme design and development?
- 3 Do you encourage input from employers into the delivery of teaching?

## 9 New College Durham - Raising awareness of the Quality Code to support enhancement

The Quality Code sets out key principles that are designed to be interpreted locally as appropriate to a provider's mission and values. In any university or college a range of staff can be involved in applying the Quality Code, all of whom must work effectively with it to assure and enhance quality. After securing Foundation Degree Awarding Powers, New College Durham undertook a number of activities to ensure that its staff knew about and understood the Quality Code. In doing so they learnt how to use it as a tool to guide reflection, evaluation and enhancement.

### What New College Durham does

New College Durham changed the structure of its course and College-level annual reports after it was awarded Foundation Degree Awarding Powers in 2011, and following the implementation of the Quality Code in 2012. An evaluation of this change revealed that there was a limited amount of knowledge and understanding of the Quality Code among many of the curriculum staff and heads of school. In response, a range of activities were organised to raise awareness of the Quality Code:

- all course teams undertook mapping exercises against all chapters and Expectations of the Quality Code
- activities using chapters of the Quality Code were included in a senior management staff development day
- curriculum managers used mapping documents at the Higher Education Curriculum and Quality Forum to facilitate shared learning between and across curriculum areas, share best practice and identify areas for enhancement
- teams in relevant support/corporate service roles were asked to map their services against the relevant chapters of the Quality Code - briefings were held with these teams to ensure they had an understanding of the Quality Code and its relevance to their role
- within two years curriculum staff had completed mapping against all chapters of the Quality Code, and evidence from this process helped to inform the evaluative judgements reached in annual reports.

The College is now confident that all staff who have a direct or indirect impact on the student experience have awareness and understanding of the Quality Code. It has developed further initiatives to focus on ensuring continuous enhancement:

- the Higher Education Development Manager produces regular Monitoring and Analysis Reports, which identify emerging themes from QAA college reviews - these reports outline key areas of good practice, affirmations and action plan recommendations, and are circulated and discussed at key meetings across the year
- curriculum managers are undertaking activities to examine College review outcomes in the context of their own practice, as a means of exploring, debating and challenging College and course-level performance.

The College has learnt from its experience that change needs to be sustainable over time, rather than attempted through a one-off activity. It recommends ensuring that support is available from senior managers from the outset, and that staff are given time and support to engage with developments.

## **What the Quality Code says**

### **General introduction**

The Quality Code provides consistent principles and practices and a common vocabulary for the management of academic standards and quality. It can be interpreted locally as appropriate to individual higher education providers' missions.

Each higher education provider develops its own systems for independent verification, both of its academic standards and quality of its provision and of the effectiveness of its quality assurance systems.

Academic and professional staff in faculties and departments are expected to be familiar with the policies that the Quality Code informs, and any parts of the Quality Code that are particularly relevant to their own responsibilities. While the wider community of higher education 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.

Enhancement can take place in different ways and at different levels, but a higher education provider 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.

### **Some questions to consider when addressing your practice**

- 1 Do your academic and professional staff know about the components of the Quality Code that are relevant to their responsibilities?
- 2 How does enhancement happen in your organisation? What policies, structures and processes support it?
- 3 Are staff given the time and support that they need to engage with quality and make improvements where necessary?

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Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB  
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel: 01452 557050  
Website: [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)