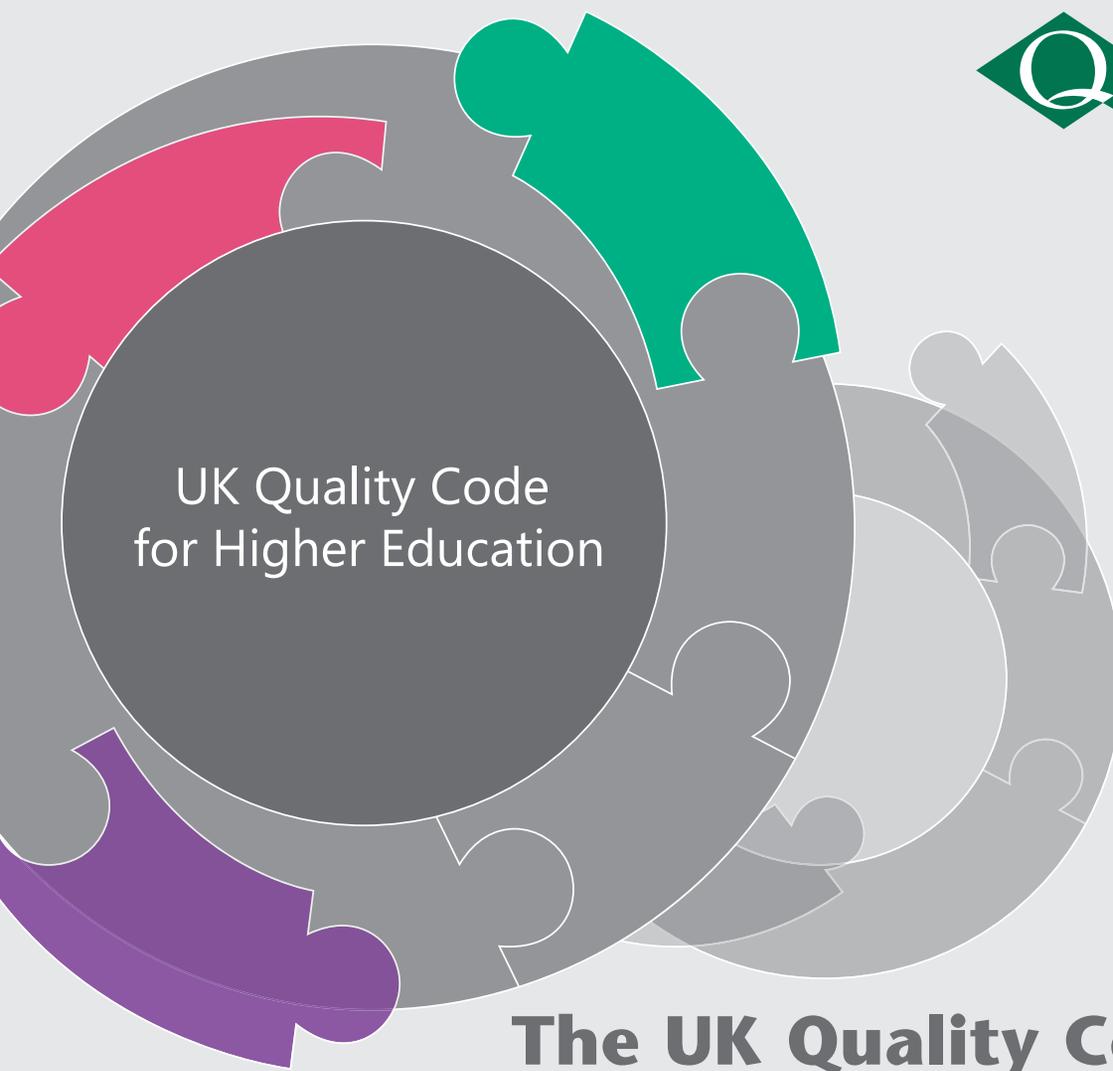




QAA



UK Quality Code
for Higher Education

**The UK Quality Code
for Higher Education:
A brief guide**



The UK Quality Code for Higher Education: A brief guide

The UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) is used to assure the standards and quality of UK higher education. It has been developed and is maintained by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) through consultation with the higher education sector. Individual higher education providers use the Quality Code to ensure students have a high quality educational experience. It consists of a General introduction and a series of separate Chapters grouped in three Parts. It is published online at www.qaa.ac.uk/qualitycode.

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.

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 refers to 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.



Who is responsible for academic standards and quality?

Individual universities and other organisations that are legally entitled to award degrees are ultimately responsible for the academic standards and quality of higher education programmes leading to their qualifications. These degree-awarding bodies are independent and self-governing. They remain responsible for their qualifications regardless of where a programme is delivered or who provides it on their behalf.

What are higher education providers?

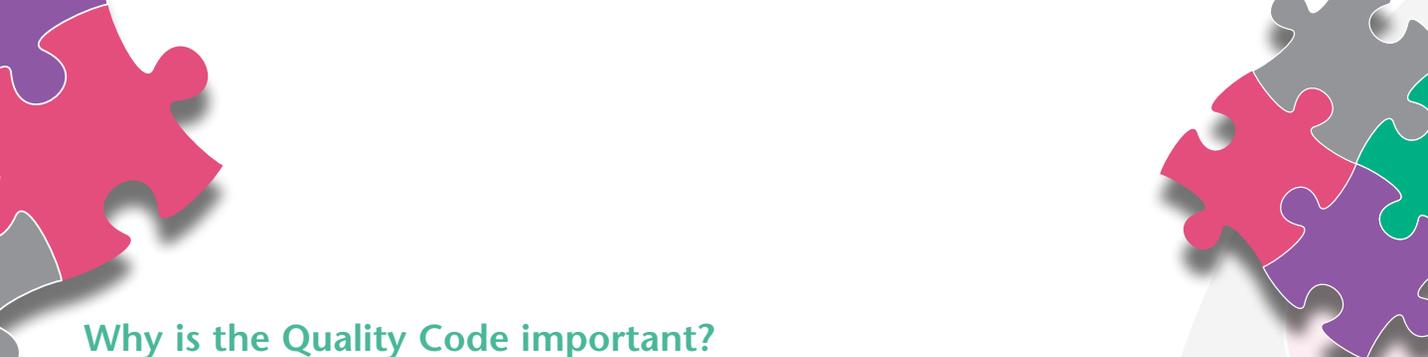
Universities and colleges, whatever their source of funding, and other organisations involved in the delivery of UK higher education programmes are known collectively as higher education providers.

Where does QAA come in?

QAA's mission is to safeguard academic standards and improve the quality of UK higher education. Our role is to support higher education providers in meeting their responsibilities for academic standards and quality, and to check that they are doing so by conducting reviews. To this end, we publish guidance to help them develop effective systems. The Quality Code is the primary source of this guidance.

What are the key features of the Quality Code?

The Quality Code sets out the formal Expectations that all UK higher education providers reviewed by QAA are required to meet. It is the nationally agreed, definitive point of reference for all those who deliver or support UK higher education programmes.



Why is the Quality Code important?

The Quality Code gives individual higher education providers a shared starting point for:

- ◉ setting and maintaining the academic standards of their higher education programmes and awards
- ◉ assuring the quality of the learning opportunities they provide for students.

This makes it possible to ensure that higher education provision and learning outcomes are comparable and consistent at a threshold level across the UK.

The purpose of the Quality Code is to:

- ◉ safeguard the academic standards of UK higher education
- ◉ assure the academic quality of learning opportunities that UK higher education offers
- ◉ promote continuous and systematic improvement in UK higher education
- ◉ ensure that information about UK higher education is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

How is the Quality Code used?

Higher education providers use the Quality Code 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.

Student representatives and students' unions can use the Quality Code in their discussions with their higher education provider, as it sets out the minimum Expectations for the quality of the learning opportunities the provider makes available to its students.



QAA reviewers use the Quality Code as a benchmark for judging whether a higher education provider meets UK Expectations for academic standards, the quality of learning opportunities, enhancement and information. Reviews also take account of students' views on the performance of their higher education provider.

What are the overarching values of the Quality Code?

The Quality Code is based on a number of key values.

- 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 clearly explained 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.

What does the Quality Code contain?

The Quality Code has a General introduction which explains the purpose and nature of the Quality Code. The main body of the Quality Code consists of three Parts (A, B and C) which address academic standards, academic quality and information respectively.

Part A

Part A: Setting and maintaining academic standards

Part A consists of three Chapters, which describe the various aspects of how academic standards are set and maintained for higher education qualifications awarded by degree-awarding bodies.

- 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.

Part B

Part B: Assuring and enhancing academic quality

Part B consists of 11 Chapters which broadly follow the student life cycle.

- 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 C

C: Information about higher education provision

Part C is shorter and is not sub-divided into Chapters. It addresses how providers produce information that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.



What are Expectations?

Expectations express key matters of principle that the higher education sector has identified as essential for assuring 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 providers.

Part A contains seven Expectations. Each of the 11 Chapters of Part B contain a single Expectation, as does Part C.

Individual providers should be able to demonstrate they are meeting the relevant Expectations effectively, through their own management and organisational processes, taking account of the unique needs, traditions, culture and decision-making processes of their own organisation.

What are Indicators of sound practice?

Indicators of sound practice help higher education providers reflect on how they might meet the relevant Expectations. They describe actions or approaches that higher education providers have agreed illustrate sound practice.

What is explanatory text?

Each Expectation in Part A and each Indicator in Parts B and C is accompanied by explanatory text which explains why it is important and describes a range of ways in which the Expectation or Indicator might be addressed and demonstrated.

How has the Quality Code been developed?

The Quality Code has been produced in consultation with the UK higher education sector and is published and maintained by QAA on their behalf. QAA works with the sector to ensure that the Quality Code remains up to date, through an ongoing process of review and revision.

What doesn't it cover?

The Quality Code relates to the learning and teaching activities of a higher education provider, including research degrees. Among the areas it does not cover are other forms of research activity, and estates management.

What if I'm concerned about the quality of a programme?

If you are a student you may find it helpful to discuss the matter with your student representative body, such as a students' union, if there is one. Your university or college will have an internal complaints process which you should follow. If you remain dissatisfied having completed all stages of the internal process, you may be able to take the matter to an external complaints body. In England and Wales this is the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (www.oiahe.org.uk), and in Scotland it is the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (www.scottishombudsman.org.uk). In Northern Ireland the universities each have a Board of Visitors, details of which can be obtained from the relevant university.

If you are a member of staff you may find it helpful to discuss the matter with the quality assurance office. There will also be an internal complaints procedure for staff.

If you are a member of the public you should contact the relevant university or college to raise your concern.

Whether you are a student, member of staff or member of the public, if you believe that your concern relates to a serious systemic failing in the way a higher education provider manages the standards or quality of its higher education provision you may be able to raise the matter through the QAA's Concerns Scheme. Find out how to do this here: www.qaa.ac.uk/complaints/concerns.

Find out more about the Quality Code

The Quality Code is available on the QAA website along with guidance, good practice and other resources. If you have any questions you can talk to your students' union, your university or college's quality assurance office, or contact QAA.

www.qaa.ac.uk/qualitycode

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