UK Quality Code for Higher Education

Part B: Assuring and Enhancing Academic Quality

Chapter B5: Student Engagement

PART

B

Contents

About the Quality Code

The UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) is the definitive reference point for all UK higher education providers.[1] It makes clear what higher education providers are required to do, what they can expect of each other, and what students and the general public can expect of them. The Quality Code covers all four nations of the UK (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales) and all providers of UK higher education operating internationally. It protects the interests of all students, regardless of where they are studying or whether they are full-time, part-time, undergraduate or postgraduate students.

The Quality Code has three Parts. Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards contains three Chapters and seven Expectations. Each of the 11 Chapters of Part B: Assuring and Enhancing Academic Quality, and Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision contain a single Expectation.
An Expectation expresses the key principle that the higher education community has identified as essential for the assurance of academic standards and quality within the area covered by the respective Chapter or Part. Higher education providers reviewed by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) are required to meet all the Expectations. The manner in which they do so is their own responsibility. QAA carries out reviews to check whether higher education providers are meeting the Expectations.[2]

The Expectations in Part C and each Chapter of Part B are accompanied by a series of Indicators that reflect sound practice, and through which providers can demonstrate they are meeting the relevant Expectation. Indicators are not designed to be used as a checklist; they are intended to help providers reflect on and develop their regulations, procedures and practices to demonstrate that the Expectations in the Quality Code are being met. Each Indicator is supported by an explanatory note that gives more information about it, together with examples of how the Indicator may be interpreted in practice. Indicators are grouped into clusters under a heading. There are no Indicators in Part A. The explanatory text provided directly supports the relevant Expectation.

Each Part and Chapter has been developed by QAA through an extensive process of consultation with higher education providers; their representative bodies; the National Union of Students; professional, statutory and regulatory bodies; and other interested parties.

The *UK Quality Code for Higher Education: General introduction*[3] should be considered in conjunction with this document. It provides a technical Introduction for users, including guidance concerning the terminology used and a quick-reference glossary. A more detailed glossary is available on QAA's website.[4]

The Quality Code and legislation

Higher education providers are responsible for meeting the requirements of legislation and any other regulatory requirements placed upon them, for example, by funding bodies. The Quality Code does not interpret legislation nor does it incorporate statutory or regulatory requirements. Sources of information about other requirements and examples of guidance and good practice are signposted within the Part or Chapter where appropriate. Higher education providers are responsible for how they use these resources.

Equality and diversity in the Quality Code

The Quality Code promotes an inclusive approach by embedding consideration of equality and diversity matters throughout. Promoting equality involves treating everyone with equal dignity and worth, irrespective of the group or groups to which they belong, while also raising aspirations and supporting achievement for people with diverse requirements, entitlements and backgrounds. An inclusive environment for learning anticipates the varied requirements of learners, for example, because of a declared disability, specific cultural background, location or age, and aims to ensure that all students have equal access to educational opportunities. Higher education providers, staff and students all have a role in and responsibility for promoting equality.

Equality of opportunity involves enabling access for people who have differing individual requirements as well as eliminating arbitrary and unnecessary barriers to learning. In addition, disabled students and non-disabled students are offered learning opportunities that are equally accessible to them, by means of inclusive design wherever possible and by means of reasonable individual adjustments wherever

necessary. Offering an equal opportunity to learn is distinguished from every student having an equal chance of success, because this is dependent on a range of factors including their motivation and engagement in learning.

All higher education providers have legal obligations which they must meet, for example, in relation to equality of opportunity and eliminating unlawful discrimination (in the UK particular considerations, such as the anticipatory duty to provide reasonable adjustments, apply to disabled students). The Quality Code does not seek to duplicate or interpret these requirements.

About this Chapter

This publication is *Chapter B5: Student Engagement* of the Quality Code. It is a new Chapter that was subject to public consultation between February 2012 and April 2012 before publication in June 2012. It became a reference point for the purposes of reviews in June 2013.

Introduction: Student engagement

This Chapter covers student engagement at undergraduate and postgraduate level, irrespective of location, mode of study, teaching delivery, or discipline. The Chapter focuses on the provision of an inclusive environment for student engagement. That environment anticipates the varied needs of learners and aims to ensure that all students have equal access to educational opportunities.

What is student engagement in the context of this Chapter?

The concept of student engagement has existed for a number of decades. The meaning has evolved over time and has been applied to any of the following: time spent on a task; quality of effort; student involvement; social and academic integration; good practices in education; and learning outcomes. The term covers two domains relating to:

- improving the motivation of students to engage in learning and to learn independently
- the participation of students in quality enhancement and quality assurance processes, resulting in the improvement of their educational experience.

This Chapter is related to the participation of students in quality enhancement and quality assurance processes, which includes but is not restricted to representation of the student view through formal representation mechanisms.

Engagement in learning and the ability to learn independently as outlined in the first bullet point is covered in *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*.[5]

Student involvement in quality

It is widely accepted that the views of students, individually and collectively, should inform quality systems with the purpose of improving the student educational experience both for current and future cohorts. Student involvement in quality can have a positive influence on the delivery and development of any aspect of the student educational experience, whether implemented by the higher education provider, a faculty, a department, or an individual member of staff. Aspects of the educational journey into which students can offer insight include:

- 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.

All students should have the opportunity to be involved in quality enhancement and assurance processes in a manner and at a level appropriate to them. In considering approaches it is important that higher education providers create a culture and environment where students are encouraged to take up the opportunities on offer. For this environment to be effective, higher education providers are likely to:

- foster active student participation in their quality systems, including using individual and collective feedback from students
- implement transparent mechanisms, agreed with students, for the nomination and election of student representatives
- provide induction and ongoing support for students and staff appropriate to their quality assurance roles
- monitor, review and enhance the effectiveness of their policies and processes for engaging students in their quality processes.

The Indicators contained within this Chapter cover these areas.

Terminology

Partner/partnership

In this Chapter, the terms 'partner' and 'partnership' are used in a broad sense to indicate joint working between students and staff. In this context partnership working is based on the values of: openness; trust and honesty; agreed shared goals and values; and regular communication between the partners. It is not based on the legal conception of equal responsibility and liability; rather partnership working recognises that all members in the partnership have legitimate, but different, perceptions and experiences. By working together to a common agreed purpose, steps can be taken that lead to enhancements for all concerned. The terms reflect a mature relationship based on mutual respect between students and staff.

Partnership working can occur both in informal and formal arrangements, including representation mechanisms involving a students' association, guild or union where one exists.

Quality system

The term 'quality system' is used in this Chapter to cover any formal or informal quality enhancement or quality assurance policy or process used by a higher education provider.

Student body

The term 'student body' is used in the broadest sense, which, depending on the context, could include:

- individual students
- groups of students with a common experience or interest
- formal representatives of a group or groups of students.

Student representatives may be affiliated with a students' association, guild or union where one exists. Both higher education providers and students benefit through the practice of working both with individuals and representatives.

External links

Higher education providers are responsible for ascertaining which laws and regulations apply to them. To meet the Expectation of this Chapter of the Quality Code, higher education providers may wish to consider the indicative lists of further guidelines, references and resources. QAA takes no responsibility for the content of external websites.

Expectation

The Quality Code sets out the following Expectation about student engagement, which higher education providers are required to meet:

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

Indicators of sound practice

Defining student engagement

Higher education providers have different missions, operate in different contexts, and have student populations that differ in composition and demographics. Providers tailor their educational offering to meet their mission and the needs of their student population. How each higher education provider defines student engagement is therefore likely to differ.

Indicator 1

Higher education providers, in partnership with their student body, define and promote the range of opportunities for any student to engage in educational enhancement and quality assurance.

Higher education is not a passive process - it is transformational for the individual, as well as having transactional elements. Higher education providers promote active involvement by students in all aspects of their learning and provide opportunities for students to influence their individual and collective learning journey.

The nature of opportunities for students to engage in formal and informal quality systems varies between higher education providers, as well as by programme, academic and organisational level (provider, faculty or department; or programme, module or individual). Once higher education providers have agreed their definition of student engagement with their student body, opportunities are promoted widely to students and staff, and student engagement is embedded in the higher education providers' quality policies, processes and practices.

A definition of student engagement may be communicated via a student charter, student contract or similar document.

Higher education providers engage the student body in an active and timely way. Higher education providers accord the same importance to early engagement with the student body, for example, during the design phase of a new curriculum, as it does to having student representation at the formal programme approval or as part of periodic programme review.

Further guidelines, references and resources

Equalities Act 2010
www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents

Higher Education Academy dimensions of student engagement
www.heacademy.ac.uk/node/3167

Higher Education Academy student engagement resources
www.heacademy.ac.uk/workstreams-research/themes/students-partners/students-partners-activities

National Union of Students/Higher Education Academy Student Engagement Toolkit
www.nusconnect.org.uk/campaigns/highereducation/student-engagement/toolkit

The Student Charter Group Final Report (January 2011)
www.gov.uk/government/uploads/systems/uploads/attachment_data/file/32420/11-736-student-charter-group.pdf

Guidance from HEFCW about funding of effective, democratic students' unions and student representation (which is mandatory in Wales from August 2012)
www.hefcw.ac.uk/documents/publications/circulars/circulars_2012/W12%2009HE%20Student%20Union%20Funding.pdf

QAA (2012) *International Students Studying in the UK - Guidance for UK Higher Education Providers*
www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/International-students-studying-in-the-UK.pdf

QAA (2012) *The UK Doctorate: A Guide for Current and Prospective Doctoral Candidates*
www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Doctorate-guide.aspx

National Union of Students and QAA (2012) *Understanding the Barriers to Student Engagement*
http://qualitymatters.nus.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/NUS_QAA-BarriersReport_V2.pdf

The environment

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.

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.

Higher education providers ensure that students are supported and informed in order to provide feedback that is effective and useful to the higher education provider. Higher education providers work with the student body to develop solutions that address issues arising from that feedback. Subsequently students are informed of the actions that have taken place to encourage further future engagement.

Higher education providers devise effective ways of communicating to students when and where their feedback has been acted upon, or where change is not possible, the reasons why this has not happened.

This is often referred to as 'closing the feedback loop'.

Students appreciate engagement opportunities timed so that they experience a direct benefit as a result of their input, in addition to the benefits provided for succeeding cohorts. For this reason, higher education providers develop a framework for eliciting comments from students that employs a range of methods, that is timely, not overly onerous, and of demonstrable direct benefit to the students providing the feedback.

Mechanisms for involving students may include:

- questionnaires; for example, at the end of a module or year
- student representative structures
- research activities; for example, through focus groups
- student membership of committees
- student consultation events
- student involvement in new projects
- student dialogue with decision makers
- online discussion forums
- formal quality processes; for example, periodic programme review.

Higher education providers make available opportunities for individual feedback, including feedback provided anonymously (for example, through student evaluations or suggestion boxes), as well as opportunities for collective feedback through student representation systems.

It is important that whatever the mechanisms used for involving students, they are not 'one-off' initiatives but are undertaken as part of a sustained strategy of student involvement.

More guidance on providing information to the student body can be found in Part C: Information About Higher Education Provision.[6]

Further guidelines, references and resources

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

National Union of Students resources - Rewarding Reps and Accreditation
www.nusconnect.org.uk/campaigns/highereducation/student-engagement/courserephub/supportingcoursereps/rewardingreps/

Representational structures

Indicator 3

Arrangements exist for the effective representation of the collective student voice at all organisational levels, and these arrangements provide opportunities for all students to be heard.

Higher education providers use effective student representation in decision-making processes including on governing boards and senior committees at provider, faculty and departmental level.

Higher education providers working in partnership with their student body are proactive in attempting to capture the educational experience of all students. Higher education providers establish arrangements with their student body which help to achieve a faithful and effective representation. Where necessary they consider using different mechanisms to reach out to different groups of students. By being flexible in approaches and in the constitution of committees, higher education providers assist representatives to represent the diversity of students.

Responses to this challenge may include initiatives such as the appointment of student liaison officers and representation coordinators; and the development of transferable skills modules specially designed for student representatives that carry academic credit or are recognised as part of a validated curriculum.

Further guidelines, references and resources

QAA (2009) *Outcomes from Institutional Audit, Second Series: Student Representation and Feedback Arrangements*
www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Outcomes-from- institutional-audit---Student-representation-and-feedback-arrangements---Second- series.aspx

Guide for Members of Higher Education Governing Bodies: Supplementary Guide Regarding the Role of University Governing Bodies in Relation to Students' Unions
www.nusconnect.org.uk/goodgovernance/guidance/

Information from Higher Education Funding Council for England about the *Higher Education Achievement Record (HEAR)*
www.hefce.ac.uk/whatwedo/lt/enh/highereducationachievementreport

Training and ongoing support

Indicator 4

Higher education providers ensure that student representatives and staff have access to training and ongoing support to equip them to fulfil their roles in educational enhancement and quality assurance effectively.

Both students and staff benefit from induction, as well as ongoing training and support relating to student engagement. Higher education providers offer and keep under review the training and support that is provided to ensure it is appropriate for the role that each individual has; for example, student representative; sabbatical officer; lecturer or tutor; module leader; programme leader; committee chair; or non-academic student support tutor. They clearly identify resources to assist students and staff to fulfil their respective roles.

Training and support help students to give feedback that is of use to the higher education provider. Higher education providers are responsible for informing student representatives about the mechanisms that exist to support them in their role, such as opportunities to gather feedback from the student body.

Staff that deal directly with students are familiar with issues which often affect students and are provided with training that enables them to respond and deal appropriately with the contribution from their students and their representatives.

Higher education providers ensure that student representatives have regular access to senior staff.

Higher education providers work actively with the student body to promote engagement of representatives through the development of close collaborative relationships and the provision of training and support materials for representatives.

Further guidelines, references and resources

QAA (2012) *Student Experience Research 2012. Part 1: Teaching and Learning*
www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/Student-Experience-Research-12-Part-1.pdf

QAA (2009) *Outcomes from Institutional Audit 2007-09: Student Engagement and Support*
www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/Outcomes-institutional-audit-2007-9-Student-engagement.pdf

The National Union of Students Course Rep Hub
www.nusconnect.org.uk/campaigns/highereducation/student-engagement/courserephub/

Report to HEFCE on Student Engagement, Centre for Higher Education Research and Information, Open University
www.open.ac.uk/cheri/documents/student-engagement-report.pdf

Supporting Students' Unions and Institutions to Engage in Shaping their Learning Experience
www-new1.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/documents/studentengagement/SE_plan.pdf

Wise Wales
www.wisewales.org.uk/

Student participation in quality Scotland (sparqs)
www.sparqs.ac.uk

Informed conversations

Indicator 5

Students and staff engage in evidence-based discussions based on the mutual sharing of information.

Higher education providers, students and their representatives facilitate the mutual sharing of information in order to enable meaningful discussions. More guidance about providing information to students can be found in Part C: Information About Higher Education Provision.[7]

The nature of the information shared varies depending on the quality systems in place and their focus within the higher education provider (organisation, faculty or department), student journey component (for example, admission, student support, assessment), or learning component (for example, programme, module, session). Examples of information to share may include:

- the results of internal and external student questionnaires and other forms of feedback, such as the National Student Survey (NSS), Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES), Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES), and the iBarometer
- analyses of student performance at module and programme level
- reports from professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs)
- employability information
- reports of actions taken by the provider to enhance the student educational experience.

Higher education providers and their student body agree between themselves which sources of information will be useful to inform their conversations.

In addition to the examples above, higher education providers also share external examining reports with the student body. For more information, see *Chapter B7: External Examining*[8] of the Quality Code.

When sharing information, higher education providers and students ensure that confidentiality is maintained to protect the rights of individuals, as well as the commercial interests of the higher education provider.

In addition, higher education providers consult with their PSRBs before making their reports available to students.

Further guidelines, references and resources

National Student Survey:
www.thestudentsurvey.com

Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey:
www.heacademy.ac.uk/PTES

Postgraduate Research Experience Survey:
www.heacademy.ac.uk/pres

Higher Education Academy Guide to Working With your Students' Union for PTES Officers:
http://wales.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/documents/postgraduate/Guide_to_Working_with_your_students_union.pdf

International Student Barometer:
www.i-graduate.org/services/international-student-barometer/

Valuing the student contribution

Indicator 6

Staff and students disseminate and jointly recognise the enhancements made to the student educational experience, and the efforts of students in achieving these successes.

Higher education providers recognise the value of the engagement of their students and ensure that students feel rewarded for their involvement. Working in partnership with their student body, higher education providers develop ways to recognise the efforts of their students and the skills they develop through taking on student engagement roles. This may include skills accreditation, awards schemes and ceremonies, and recording activity in transcripts or higher education achievement records.

Further guidelines, references and resources

QAA (2012) *Student Experience Research 2012. Part 1: Teaching and Learning*: www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Student-Experience-Research-12-Part-1.aspx

Monitoring, review and continuous improvement

Indicator 7

The effectiveness of student engagement is monitored and reviewed at least annually, using pre-defined key performance indicators, and policies and processes are enhanced where required.

All quality systems are regularly monitored to ensure that they are working effectively and can demonstrate positive outcomes. Higher education providers ensure that the student body is fully involved in these processes, including identifying in advance the key performance indicators to be used to measure progress.

Performance indicators may consider aspects such as the effectiveness of systems, progress in engaging all groups, and outcomes in relation to demonstrable enhancements to the educational experience as a result of student engagement.

Further guidelines, references and resources

National Union of Students - benchmarking student rep systems:
www.nusconnect.org.uk/campaigns/highereducation/student-engagement/courserephub/supportingcoursereps/benchmarkingstudentrepsystems

See also:
www.nusconnect.org.uk/asset/news/6066/courserep-benchmarking-systems.pdf

Appendix 1 - The Expectation and Indicators Student Engagement

The Expectation

The Quality Code sets out the following Expectation about student engagement, which higher education providers are required to meet:

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

The Indicators of sound practice

Indicator 1

Higher education providers, in partnership with their student body, define and promote the range of opportunities for any student to engage in educational enhancement and quality assurance.

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.

Indicator 3

Arrangements exist for the effective representation of the collective student voice at all organisational levels, and these arrangements provide opportunities for all students to be heard.

Indicator 4

Higher education providers ensure that student representatives and staff have access to training and ongoing support to equip them to fulfil their roles in educational enhancement and quality assurance effectively.

Indicator 5

Students and staff engage in evidence-based discussions based on the mutual sharing of information.

Indicator 6

Staff and students to disseminate and jointly recognise the enhancements made to the student educational experience, and the efforts of students in achieving these successes.

Indicator 7

The effectiveness of student engagement is monitored and reviewed at least annually, using pre-defined key performance indicators, and policies and processes enhanced where required.

Appendix 2 - Membership of the Advisory Group for this Chapter

Name	Position	Affiliation
Thelma Barron	Assistant Director	QAA Scotland
Janet Bohrer	Assistant Director	QAA (Chair)
Professor Stuart Brand	Director of Teaching and Learning	Birmingham City University
Colin Bryson	Director, Combined Honours Centre and Chair of RAISE Network (Researching, Advancing and Inspiring Student Engagement)	Newcastle University
Dan Derricott	Student Officer	University of Lincoln Students' Union
Dr Ian Giles	Emeritus Fellow, formerly University Director of Education	University of Southampton (specialist author)
Emelie Helsen	Advocacy Manager	City University London Students' Union
David Lloyd	Head of Academic Policy Support	Cardiff University
Dr Cathy Kerfoot	Development Officer	QAA
Eve Lewis	Head of sparqs	student participation in quality scotland
Neil Mackenzie	Students' Union Manager	Bradford College Students' Union

Dr Iain Morrison	Head of Student Services	University of Highlands and Islands
Fiona Nouri	Head of Student Support	Royal Veterinary College
Dr Cliona O'Neill	Senior Learning and Teaching Manager	Higher Education Funding Council for Wales and Wales Initiative for Student Enagagement
Derfel Owen	Student Engagement and Participation Development Manager	University of Exeter
Tim Stewart	Dean of Learning and Teaching	BPP University College
Professor Paul Trowler	Professor of Higher Education	Lancaster University
Gwen van der Velden	Director of Learning and Teaching Enhancement	University of Bath
Kate Wicklow	Student Engagement Manager	National Union of Students
Gail Wilson	Student Engagement Coordinator	QAA
Dr Stephanie Wilson	Director, Corporate Performance and Quality	University of London, International Academy
Professor Dennis John Wright	Dean of Students, Learning and Teaching	Imperial College, London

References

[1] www.qaa.ac.uk/AssuringStandardsAndQuality/

[2] www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education

[3] www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=181

[4] www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us/glossary

[5] www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=171

[6] www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/quality-code-part-c

[7] www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/quality-code-part-c

[8] www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=179