The revised UK Quality Code for Higher Education

UKSCQA/02

March 2018

UKSCQA provides sector-led oversight of those higher education quality assessment arrangements that continue to be shared across the UK. The Committee has a number of members drawn from publicly funded universities and colleges, and from providers designated for student support by the Secretary of State in England. Student interests are represented by both the National Union of Students and individual student members. Membership is also drawn from the four UK higher education funding bodies and regulators, sector bodies and regulatory partners: www.ukscqa.org.uk.

The QAA is coordinating the review of the UK Quality Code on behalf of UKSCQA. The review is undertaken on behalf of all members, including the four UK higher education funding bodies: DfENI, HEFCE, HEFCW and SFC. On 1 April 2018, HEFCE's responsibilities as a member of UKSCQA transfer to the Office for Students (OfS).

Alternative formats

This publication is available in English and Welsh. Both versions can be downloaded from the UKSCQA website (www.ukscqa.org.uk) and from the QAA website (www.qaa.ac.uk). For readers without access to the internet, it can be supplied on CD or in large print by HEFCE, who provide the secretariat for UKSCQA. For alternative format versions please call 0117 931 7305 or email customerservices@hefce.ac.uk

The revised UK Quality Code for Higher Education

Developed by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) on behalf of the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment (UKSCQA) in consultation with the higher education (HE) sector.

The revised UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Code) ensures that the Code will continue to fulfil its role as the cornerstone for quality in UK higher education, protecting the public and student interest, and championing UK higher education's world-leading reputation for quality. The Code is now future-facing, accessible, and truly UK-wide. UKSCQA and QAA have considered students' and providers' feedback carefully, and are now presenting a Code that is fit for purpose in an evolving regulatory landscape, and accessible to the full diversity of the sector and its wider stakeholders.

The Code continues to articulate fundamental principles that should apply to higher education quality across the UK, irrespective of changing national contexts. These include principles such as emphasising the role of providers in assuring the quality of the experience they offer to students, supporting student engagement, and ensuring external referencing is used to ensure the integrity of awards and the quality of provision.

The Code embodies the co-regulatory approach that underpins UK higher education. The input of the sector has been invaluable in drafting the new Expectations and practices, and both UKSCQA and QAA look forward to working closely with students and providers on the next stage of the review. We hope that the formulation of the new Code will encourage broader engagement with the Code from academic staff, students and other stakeholders.

Structure

The revised Code is based on three elements that together provide a reference point for effective quality assurance:

1. **Expectations** which clearly and succinctly express the outcomes providers should achieve in setting and maintaining the standards of their awards, and for managing the quality of their provision.

2. **Practices** representing effective ways of working that underpin the delivery of the expectations, and will deliver positive outcomes for students. These include:

    a. **Core practices** that must be demonstrated by all UK higher education providers as part of assuring their standards and quality;

    b. **Common practices** that will be applied by providers in line with their missions, their regulatory context and the needs of their students. These are practices common to the underpinning of quality in all UK providers but are not regulatory requirements for providers in England.

3. **Advice and guidance** which will help established and new providers alike to develop and maintain effective quality assurance practices.

The UK Quality Code

Expectations for standards		Expectations for quality	
The academic standards of courses meet the requirements of the relevant national qualifications framework. The value of qualifications awarded to students at the point of qualification and over time is in line with sector-recognised standards.		Courses are well-designed, provide a high-quality academic experience for all students and enable a student's achievement to be reliably assessed. From admission through to completion, all students are provided with the support that they need to succeed in and benefit from higher education.	
Core practices	**Common practices**	**Core practices**	**Common practices**
The provider ensures that the threshold standards for its qualifications are consistent with the relevant national qualifications frameworks. The provider ensures that students who are awarded qualifications have the opportunity to achieve standards beyond the threshold level that are reasonably comparable with those achieved in other UK providers. Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the standards of its awards are credible and secure irrespective of where or how courses are delivered or who delivers them. The provider uses external expertise, assessment and classification processes that are reliable, fair and transparent.	The provider reviews its core practices for standards regularly and uses the outcomes to drive improvement and enhancement.	The provider has a reliable, fair and inclusive admissions system. The provider designs and/or delivers high-quality courses. The provider has sufficient appropriately qualified and skilled staff to deliver a high-quality academic experience. The provider has sufficient and appropriate facilities, learning resources and student support services to deliver a high-quality academic experience. The provider actively engages students, individually and collectively, in the quality of their educational experience. The provider has fair and transparent procedures for handling complaints and appeals which are accessible to all students. Where the provider offers research degrees, it delivers these in appropriate and supportive research environments. Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the academic experience is high-quality irrespective of where or how courses are delivered and who delivers them. The provider supports all students to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes.	The provider reviews its core practices for quality regularly and uses the outcomes to drive improvement and enhancement. The provider's approach to managing quality takes account of external expertise. The provider engages students individually and collectively in the development, assurance and enhancement of the quality of their educational experience.

How the Code will be used

The Code will be used by UK higher education providers in order to ensure they are achieving the outcomes that are expected of them. The Code presents a series of reference points to aid providers in offering their students a high-quality experience, supporting them through well-designed courses to achieve the qualifications that will help them to fulfil their longer term career aspirations. Providers should use the Code in line with their educational mission, national quality arrangements, and regulatory requirements. Higher education students and their representatives should use the Code as a starting point for engaging with their provider on the quality of their education, and the extent to which the expected outcomes have been achieved.

National funders and regulators, in collaboration with the Quality Assurance Agency, will use the Code as a basis for assessing the quality of higher education provision in line with their statutory responsibilities. As higher education is the responsibility of devolved administrations the precise national arrangements for quality assessment differ, including how parts of the Code will be used in external oversight and review. This is within the context of an overarching UK approach.

Transitional arrangements for moving to the new Code as a reference point for quality assessment reviews vary across the nations. Those providers undergoing a review in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland will be asked to reference the current Code as part of the review method until August 2019, as will alternative providers in England undergoing annual monitoring and other review related activities. Providers in Scotland with an Enhancement Led Institutional Review visit scheduled between August and December 2019 should discuss the detailed arrangements for referencing the Code with QAA Scotland. Quality Review Visits in England will also be undertaken with reference to the existing Code until June 2018. The new Expectations and practices of the Code underpin the quality and standards conditions of registration that new providers will need to meet when seeking OfS registration.

Next steps:

UKSCQA will undertake a comprehensive consultation, coordinated by the QAA, on the themes that will make up the advice and guidance part of the revised Code. These consultation events will take place in May 2018 in all four nations of the UK. Details on how to sign up for these events can be found on the QAA and UKSCQA websites.

Annex

Glossary

The terms below are defined for the purpose and in the context of quality assurance in UK higher education, and the definitions provided apply throughout the Quality Code. Further information to support the definitions provided will be made available in the advice and guidance that underpins the Code. Please note that the terms below may be defined differently in other contexts (within and beyond HE) and by different stakeholders (regulators, students, individual providers, for example).

All students – this refers to all students irrespective of background or any protected characteristics, studying at any level and by any mode (e.g. undergraduate and postgraduate; full-time and part-time; distance, work-based and on-campus learners; HE apprentices).

Academic experience – this encompasses the students' experience of studying on their course, and their experience of any other resources, support, facilities and opportunities that the provider makes available to support students' learning.

Core practices – practices required by all UK HE regulatory jurisdictions.

Common practices – practices common to the underpinning of quality in all UK providers but not regulatory requirements for providers in England.

High quality – high quality is defined as quality which can consistently lead to credible and recognised positive outcomes for students. High quality is the minimum level of quality that is expected of all providers of UK HE.

Over time – over time refers to the need for the achievements represented by a qualification to be comparable with those of previous and future graduates with the same qualification.

Partnership – covers all arrangements where a provider works with others to design and/or deliver courses and/or to award qualifications. These can include validation and subcontracting (or franchising) arrangements, work-based learning arrangements and collaboration with employers (including to deliver apprenticeships), transnational education (TNE) arrangements, and international partnerships and collaborations. The processes that providers will need to follow in order to assure high quality will vary considerably depending on the type of partnership concerned, and the risks involved.

Value – the term 'value' refers to the credibility and standing of qualifications, and their reliability as a reflection and consistent record of academic achievement.

Enhancement – the process by which higher education providers systematically improve the quality of provision and the ways in which students' learning is supported.