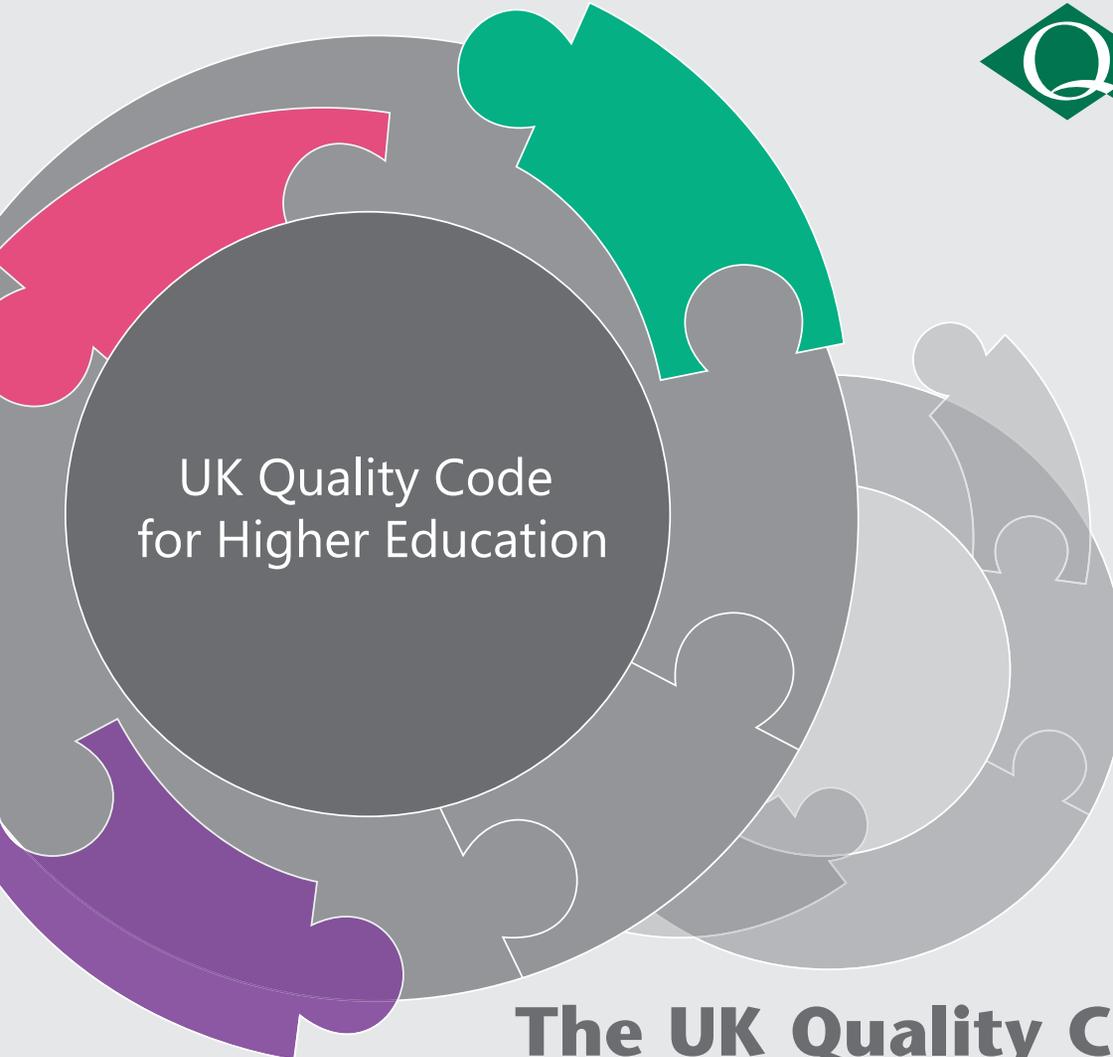




**QAA**



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 higher education in the United Kingdom. It is developed and maintained by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) through consultation with the higher education sector and is used by individual higher education providers to ensure students have the high-quality educational experience they are entitled to expect. It consists of a series of separate Chapters grouped in three Parts and published online at [www.qaa.ac.uk/assuringstandardsandquality/quality-code](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuringstandardsandquality/quality-code).

## How do we define standards and quality?

---

Threshold **academic standards** are the minimum level of achievement that you have to reach to succeed on your course and achieve the qualification. A key feature of this is that threshold standards should not vary from one higher education provider to another.

**Academic quality** is how well your higher education provider supports you in your learning: the teaching, the support available, how you are assessed, and the resources available.

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



## Who is responsible for standards and quality?

---

Individual universities and colleges, which are generally independent and self-governing, are responsible for the academic standards and quality of the UK higher education that they provide. All universities or colleges, public or private, that deliver UK higher education courses are known as **higher education providers**.

## Where does QAA come in?

---

QAA's job is to support higher education providers in meeting their responsibilities for standards and quality, and to check that they are doing so. To this end QAA publishes guidance to help them develop effective systems. The principal element of this is the Quality Code.

## 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 involved in delivering higher education programmes that lead to an award from, or are validated by, a UK higher education awarding body (a provider entitled to award degrees). All higher education providers reviewed by QAA must commit to meeting the Expectations that it sets out.

### The purpose of the Quality Code is:

- to safeguard the academic standards of UK higher education
- to assure the quality of the learning opportunities that UK higher education offers to students
- to promote continuous and systematic improvement in UK higher education
- to ensure that information about UK higher education is publicly available.



## 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 outcomes are comparable and consistent at a threshold level across the UK.

## How is the Quality Code used?

---

**Higher education providers** use the Quality Code to help them to set and maintain the academic standards of their programmes and awards, assure and enhance the quality of the learning opportunities they make available, and provide information about higher education.

**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.

**Reviewers** carrying out QAA reviews use the Quality Code as a benchmark for judging whether an individual higher education provider meets national expectations for academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. (QAA reviews also take account of students' views on their higher education provider's performance: find out more in the mini guide to Institutional Review.)



## What are the key values of the Quality Code?

The Quality Code is based on a number of key values, which are set out below.

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

## What does the Quality Code contain?

---

The Quality Code has three Parts (A, B and C) on standards, quality and information. These are broken down into a series of Chapters which cover different aspects of higher education. Each Chapter sets out an Expectation for the topic and a series of Indicators that reflect sound practice.

## Part A

### **Part A: Setting and maintaining threshold academic standards**

These Chapters cover the issues relevant to the setting and maintaining of academic standards.

- Chapter A1: The national level
- Chapter A2: The subject and qualification level
- Chapter A3: The programme level
- Chapter A4: Approval and review
- Chapter A5: Externality
- Chapter A6: Assessment of achievement of learning outcomes



## Part B

### **Part B: Assuring and enhancing academic quality**

These Chapters cover the issues relevant to ensuring that the quality of learning opportunities meets expectations and is continually being improved.

- Chapter B1: Programme design and approval
- Chapter B2: Admissions
- Chapter B3: Learning and teaching
- Chapter B4: Student support, learning resources and careers education, information, advice and guidance
- Chapter B5: Student engagement
- Chapter B6: Assessment of students and accreditation of prior learning
- Chapter B7: External examining
- Chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review
- Chapter B9: Complaints and appeals
- Chapter B10: Management of collaborative arrangements
- Chapter B11: Research degrees



## Part C

### **Part C: Information about higher education provision**

This shorter Part is not subdivided into Chapters. It addresses how providers make available information that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

## What are Expectations?

---

Each Chapter of the Quality Code sets out a specific **Expectation**. Expectations express key matters of principle that the higher education community has identified as important 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 all of them.

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

## What are Indicators?

---

Each Chapter of the Quality Code sets out a series of **Indicators** to help higher education providers meet the relevant Expectations. These are actions or approaches that higher education providers have agreed reflect sound practice.

Each Indicator is accompanied by explanatory text which shows why it is important and suggests possible ways in which it might be addressed and demonstrated.

## How has the Quality Code been developed?

---

The Quality Code replaces the Academic Infrastructure, the previous set of reference points developed by QAA in partnership with the higher education sector. It is owned by 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 represents Expectations on which all higher education providers are agreed and that it 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. Among the areas it does not cover are research (beyond the provision of research degree programmes), and estates management.

## What if I'm concerned about the quality of my course?

---

You should try to resolve any concerns locally in the first instance by talking to your student representative body or to the quality assurance office at your university or college, or through the internal complaints process. If your concern is still unresolved after this you have two main options.

- If the problem is a 'one-off' (specific to your own circumstances), you can ask the Office of the Independent Adjudicator to investigate ([www.oiahe.org.uk](http://www.oiahe.org.uk)), or the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman ([www.scottishombudsman.org.uk](http://www.scottishombudsman.org.uk)) for providers in Scotland.
- If you believe your concern relates to serious flaws in how the provider manages standards and quality you can raise it through QAA's concerns scheme. Find out how to do this here: [www.qaa.ac.uk/complaints/concerns](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/complaints/concerns).

## Find out more

---

The Quality Code is available on QAA's website along with guidance, good practice and helpful information. If you have any questions you can talk to your student representative body, your university or college's quality assurance office, or contact QAA by email: [qualitycode@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:qualitycode@qaa.ac.uk).

[www.qaa.ac.uk/assuringstandardsandquality/quality-code](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuringstandardsandquality/quality-code)

### For further information please contact:

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education  
Southgate House  
Southgate Street  
Gloucester GL1 1UB

Tel 01452 557000  
Fax 01452 557070  
Email [comms@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:comms@qaa.ac.uk)  
Website [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2012

ISBN 978 1 84979 489 3

Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786