UK Quality Code

for Higher Education

Advice and Guidance

Learning and Teaching

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Contents

Regulatory contexts for the Quality Code

The Expectations and Core practices of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) are mandatory for higher education providers in all parts of the UK. Common practices are mandatory in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and while providers in England may choose to work towards them, they are not required to do so as these are not regulatory requirements and will not be assessed as part of the OfS's regulatory framework. National regulators and QAA are not bound by the information in this advice and guidance and will not view it as containing indicators of compliance. This guidance does not interpret statutory requirements.

Terminology

Learning: The process through which students acquire new, build on, or reformulate existing, knowledge, skills and practice. 'Teaching' is any activity that facilitates this learning.

Effective learning and teaching: Learning and teaching that enables student achievement towards their intended qualifications or awards, through education that they, and other stakeholders, value. This may be monitored through providers evaluating learner engagement levels.

Stakeholders: The wider community of individuals and bodies that inform, influence and/or contribute to learning and teaching practice in higher education.

Expectations and Practices

The advice underneath the Expectations and Practices is not mandatory for providers but illustrative of a range of possible approaches.

This Theme gives guidance to providers to help support the provision of effective, high-quality learning opportunities for all students, wherever or however the learning is enabled and whoever enables it. It applies to any learning opportunity that leads to the award of a UK higher education qualification or academic credit, from short courses involving single modules to multi-year courses. Learning and teaching enables students' achievement to be reliably evaluated through assessment, calibrated to the national reference points, for example the Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications.

Expectations for quality

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.

Effective learning and teaching combines robust pedagogic approaches with relevant discipline knowledge, subject-specific and transferable skills, aligned to providers' descriptors of graduate attributes, appropriate to the academic level of study and reflective of the changing world. Learning and teaching displays breadth, depth, pace and challenge.

Staff are appropriately supported and developed, in turn, to support their students. Learning and teaching activity is inclusive in its approach, providing all students with parity of quality of learning opportunities, ensuring they are appropriately supported to flourish.

Core practices

- **The provider has sufficient appropriately qualified and skilled staff to deliver a high-quality academic experience.**
  In practice, this means that providers ensure individuals and teams involved in teaching and supporting students demonstrate an appropriate mix of academic, professional and pedagogic knowledge and skills.

- **The provider has sufficient and appropriate facilities, learning resources and student support services to deliver a high-quality academic experience.**
  In practice, this means that providers plan for, invest in and maintain an appropriate environment for delivery of their learning and teaching. Learning facilities and resources are accessible and relevant to students' development of their knowledge and skills.

- **The provider actively engages students, individually and collectively, in the quality of their educational experience.**
  In practice, this means that providers use engagement to assess the effectiveness of learning and teaching provision.

- **The provider supports all students to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes.**
  In practice, this means that providers ensure the availability of an inclusive and engaging learning environment in which all students are supported to succeed. They design and deliver learning and teaching to develop subject-specific and transferable skills that enhance students' personal development and employment opportunities, including self-employment. Providers continually evaluate the effectiveness of learning and teaching in the context of student needs, achievement and progression.

Common practice

- **The provider engages students individually and collectively in the development, assurance and enhancement of the quality of their educational experience.**
  In practice, this means that providers engage students, and alumni where practicable, to design, monitor, review and enhance learning and teaching. Student feedback is responded to and/or acted upon to enhance the quality of learning and teaching.

Guiding principles

The guiding principles given here are not mandatory for any provider. They are a concise expression of the fundamental practices of the higher education sector, based on the experience of a wide range of providers. They are intended as a framework for providers to consider when establishing new or looking at existing higher education provision. They are not exhaustive and there will be other ways for providers to meet their requirements.

1 **Effective learning and teaching is underpinned by a shared understanding of the provider's learning and teaching strategy.**

Providers adopt an evidence-based strategic approach to learning and teaching, developed and delivered in partnership with staff, students and other stakeholders (where relevant). Course-level strategies for learning and teaching are consistent with provider-level strategy and tailored to the specific needs of the discipline, which may include relationships with professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs).

2 **Effective learning and teaching is underpinned by a focus on student achievement and outcomes.**

Providers design, deliver, monitor and evaluate learning and teaching with a focus on the outcomes to be achieved by the student and how effectively the chosen learning and teaching approaches enable this. Providers use a variety of evidence to assess student achievement and outcomes throughout their educational experience and respond accordingly.

3 **Effective learning and teaching provides students with an equivalent high-quality learning experience irrespective of where, how or by whom it is delivered.**

The nature, content and context of students' learning experiences may vary but providers ensure parity of quality of learning opportunities by adopting inclusive learning and teaching practices (see the Assessment Theme for guidance on how this is mirrored in providers' approaches to assessment). Providers ensure that practices take account of different ways of learning, modes of study, diverse educational, linguistic, social and cultural backgrounds, and abilities to provide a flexible and inclusive approach that enables and empowers every student to fulfil their potential and achieve a successful outcome.

4 **Effective learning and teaching is informed through reflective practice and providers enable staff to engage in relevant, timely and appropriate professional development that supports students' learning and high-quality teaching.**

Effective student learning is facilitated by interaction with appropriately qualified, supported and developed teaching and support staff. Providers ensure that staff demonstrate up-to-date knowledge and practice in both their subject and appropriate pedagogies. Providers ensure that staff engage in self-reflection to appropriately inform their learning, teaching and assessment design and practice. Staff are provided with access to continuing professional development (CPD) that is planned, monitored and evaluated (for example, for its impact on student achievement, where possible). Providers offer opportunities for all those involved in learning and teaching to inform each other's practice and experience.

5 **Effective learning and teaching is underpinned by routine evaluation of provision to manage and enhance their learning and teaching activities, including achievement of qualification and award outcomes.**

Providers use a range of internal and external information and feedback to enable them to keep their approach to learning and teaching under review, taking deliberate steps to facilitate the continuous improvement of the learning opportunities and support they provide. Evaluation and enhancement takes place for all learning and teaching activities.

6 **Effective learning and teaching activities, facilities and resources make the learning environment accessible, relevant and engaging to all students.**

Providers design their learning environment to be safe, accessible and suitable for the nature of the learning activities and planned in a systematic way in consultation with students. The learning environment may encompass:

- physical environment (seating, lighting and acoustics, availability of technology)

- virtual environment (technological facilities including virtual learning environments and library systems)

- social learning environment (dialogue based on mutual dignity and respect and a safe environment for exploring new ideas and providing feedback).

7 **Effective learning and teaching ensures that information about, and support for, learning and teaching is clear and accessible to all students and stakeholders.**

Providers give clarity on the responsibilities of staff, students and, where appropriate, other stakeholders (such as employers involved in work–based learning and apprenticeships) for learning and teaching and its support. Information is provided in an inclusive, transparent and accessible way. Providers engage students to monitor, review and evaluate this information to ensure that it meets the needs of different groups of students.

8 **Effective learning and teaching encourages and enables students to take an active role in their studies.**

Providers enable students to engage in independent learning relevant to the level of study, working in partnership with individuals and teams to display appropriate academic behaviour and integrity. Providers assist students to transition and progress through their studies.

9 **Providers encourage and enable students to evaluate and manage their own learning development, supported by opportunities for ongoing dialogue with staff.**

Providers encourage students to evaluate their learning experiences and provide feedback in dialogue with individuals and teams through deliberate steps that inform the enhancement of learning and teaching.

This section provides practical, contextualised advice to providers on learning and teaching. Where relevant, we have indicated which guiding principles the advice will help you achieve. Please bear in mind this advice is illustrative and intended to inform the approaches you consider and ultimately implement.

Effective learning and teaching (Guiding principles 4, 7, 8)

Effective learning and teaching in practice features:

- delivery by individuals appropriately qualified in learning and teaching practice, whose ongoing development is underpinned by robust evidence and expertise

- delivery by individuals with disciplinary and/or interdisciplinary expertise appropriate to the level of student learning

- inclusive learning and teaching practice

- higher education providers, staff, students and other stakeholders working in partnership with students as co-creators in shaping their learning experience

- support for learning in a range of environments, which may extend beyond the provider.

Reflective question

- What steps do you take to ensure effective learning and teaching?

Inclusive learning and teaching design (Guiding principles 1, 3, 4)

Curriculum development processes culminating in formal course approval (validation) support the design and delivery of teaching and learning activities (see also Course Design and Development Theme). Higher education providers articulate and implement a strategic approach to learning and teaching that ensures the provision of appropriate, high-quality and inclusive learning experiences, irrespective of where or when they are delivered, capable of supporting all students to achieve their intended learning. A well-designed and inclusive learning environment anticipates the multiple requirements of diverse types of learners and aims to eliminate any arbitrary and unnecessary barriers to learning.

Providers have a specific responsibility under UK equality legislation to ensure that students with learning difficulties or disabilities are not placed at a disadvantage and receive accessible learning opportunities by means of inclusive design wherever possible, and through reasonable individual adjustments at the point of need. Staff receive guidance and support to understand the impact of equality legislation on their roles and create an inclusive learning culture for which they have a shared responsibility with providers. Staff work with individual students to understand the implications of any specific requirements or reasonable adjustments for their own teaching practices. Staff access appropriate support to develop inclusive forms of learning and teaching (and assessment), which may be enabled by new technologies.

Reflective question

- Does your institution's strategy articulate a strategic approach to learning and teaching ensuring it is appropriate, high quality and inclusive?

Learning and teaching's role in developing graduate attributes (Guiding principles 5, 6, 8)

Learning and teaching activities locate the delivery of curriculum in local, national and/or global contexts to develop graduate attributes in line with providers' individual missions and learning and teaching strategies. Examples and resources are drawn from a sufficiently broad range of sources, cultures and viewpoints. Academic and subject-related skills are complemented by the development of transferable skills, including creative and critical thinking, which enhance students' general employability and promote entrepreneurial behaviour. The promotion and development of digital skills and behaviours ('digital literacy') are also crucial to graduates' ability to thrive in an increasingly connected, complex world and competitive global jobs market.

> **Reflective question**
>
> - How do your learning and teaching activities contribute to the development of your students' skills and attributes?

Assessment and learning (Guiding principles 2, 3, 9)

Learning and teaching activities provide the basis for assessment, both of individuals and of groups, and support their academic, intellectual and personal development by establishing links between modules, subjects and levels of study. Learning and teaching activities are designed in alignment with knowledge and skills-based outcomes and related formative and summative assessments through which students' understanding and skills are developed (assessment for learning), and their learning measured and evaluated (assessment of learning) (see also Assessment Theme).

While the purpose of formative assessment is to facilitate learning development, summative assessment is also formative where it relates to developing knowledge and skills that extend beyond a specific assessment task or module, for example, the ability to think creatively and critically.

Students' engagement in formative learning activities is stimulated by their understanding of the value of feedback, from peers as well as from staff, which can aid their learning. Personal development planning (PDP) provides a structured and supported process, open to learners in all settings and at all levels, by which they may reflect on their own learning, performance and achievement to inform their further development. Approaches to PDP can vary from standalone delivery, often managed by personal tutors, to integrated or embedded PDP models; all of these have in common the facility for learners actively to record, monitor and reflect critically on their progress and related actions for their personal, professional and academic development in an ongoing dialogue with teaching staff.

The use of multiple teaching and learning approaches, in tandem with varied and relevant assessment strategies, complements individuals' different ways of learning, while enabling them to experience new techniques and develop and practice new skills, attributes and qualities. The assessment schedule of a course, module or session facilitates feedback, reflection and dialogue, taking into account the importance of students having sufficient time to put their learning into practice including in the next round of assessment.

> **Reflective question**
>
> - Are your learning and teaching activities aligned with knowledge and skills-based outcomes and the activities which assess them?

Students and others as 'co-creators' (Guiding principles 5, 7, 8, 9)

The involvement of students in the design and delivery of learning and teaching activities, and of other stakeholders where appropriate, is conducive to establishing their appropriateness, relevance and value. Students are consulted about the effectiveness of learning and teaching through surveys and other feedback mechanisms by which course improvements may be identified and implemented. While the facility to negotiate assessment methods, essay titles or research (dissertation) topics provides some opportunity for self-initiated learning and enquiry, students may be engaged more proactively as 'co-creators' by other means that help promote their development as active and autonomous learners. This may include students helping to shape providers' learning and teaching strategies and/or as members of course design teams (see also Course Design and Development and Student Engagement Themes).

Other stakeholder involvement, for example by employers, alumni and professional bodies, is similarly most effective where it extends beyond simple consultation and feedback to active participation in the design of learning and teaching activities.

Providers engage students in designing learning and teaching, for example the development of learning and teaching strategies and/or as members of course development teams (see also Student Engagement Theme).

> **Reflective question**
>
> - To what extent are students, employers and other stakeholders involved in the design and delivery of learning and teaching activities? What systems are in place to ensure this?

Staff qualifications, research and professional development (Guiding principles 3, 4)

Effective learning and teaching occurs when staff display a sound understanding and up-to-date knowledge of their subject, pedagogies and/or professional practice and bring this to a variety of appropriately-designed learning and teaching activities. Recruitment and appointment procedures ensure that new staff have an appropriate level of competence for teaching and supporting learning. Providers consider the extent to which staff have:

- appropriate and current practitioner knowledge and an understanding of the subject they teach (which may be demonstrated by an academic qualification and any relevant professional or industry qualification or recognition), and an understanding of the disciplinary scholarship appropriate to the academic level of the students they are teaching

- the necessary knowledge, skills and experience to facilitate learning using processes and approaches grounded in sound learning and teaching scholarship and practice.

Staff draw on scholarship, research and professional activity to facilitate student learning which may include conventional research (discovery of new knowledge), innovative application or integration and synthesis of existing knowledge (for example, in professional practice), or the study of learning and teaching processes and practices (pedagogic development). Teaching staff model good academic practice to students which reinforces their understanding and appreciation of ethical research behaviours and academic integrity.

Specialist support staff contribute to learning and teaching (for example, in the design and delivery of inclusive curricula and learning environments), while learning facilitators, library staff, demonstrators and technicians work alongside teaching staff to support students' learning across a range of environments. Awarding bodies ensure that staff of third-party organisations who deliver their courses are appropriately qualified and supported. Visiting lecturers, including graduate alumni, enhance the professional/vocational relevance of course content and delivery.

Staff are encouraged to value their own and others' skills, to recognise that they have a responsibility to identify their own development needs and to engage in initial and continuing professional development. Staff new to teaching or supporting student learning engage in appropriate induction and mentoring activities (such as observed teaching) and may also access postgraduate teaching qualifications. Once appointed and throughout their careers, staff engage with CPD to develop and extend their

teaching capabilities and reflect critically on their teaching practice. The UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) provides a mechanism for recognising and benchmarking teaching and learning support roles within higher education by ensuring that they meet expected national standards. Providers may use the UKPSF to support staff recognition and reward processes and promotion opportunities for all academic career paths through professional accreditation at relevant levels of Fellowship (Associate, Fellow, Senior Fellow and Principal Fellow).

Staff development activities are planned strategically with sufficient resources being allocated to cover the needs of both research and learning and teaching development, including protected time factored into staff workload allocation. Providers assure themselves of the effectiveness of their approaches to staff development and have procedures to identify teachers in need of additional support, providing them with opportunities, support and mentoring to enable the improvement of their skills and competency to an agreed level. Providers ensure that part-time and associate tutors, including graduate teaching assistants and visiting lecturers, have the necessary support for teaching and assessing students both formatively and summatively.

> **Reflective question**
>
> - How do you ensure that staff have appropriate and current knowledge and understanding of the subject, as well as the necessary knowledge, skills and experience to facilitate learning?

Learning environments (Guiding principles 3, 6, 7)

Learning and teaching activities take place within a broad learning environment comprised of physical and/or virtual facilities, with an academic culture and learning ethos promoted by providers and their staff. Physical learning environments are applicable and appropriate to the mode and location of learning and are safe, reliable and accessible to all students and staff. Providers have a systematic and proactive approach to the planning and refurbishment of learning spaces in preference to making ad hoc adjustments. Where appropriate, learning spaces enable informal (social) as well as formal learning, for example through group collaboration and dialogue.

Providers make clear to students the learning opportunities and support available to them and how these can be accessed. The information provided reflects the specific nature of the learning opportunities and support available, including any study undertaken outside the provider's own location (for example, fieldwork, placement or work-based learning) or through a VLE. It also makes clear where these are delivered by the provider or another organisation, such as an employer or collaborative partner.

Providers involve learners in developing and maintaining fully-accessible learning environments, especially for those with specific requirements such as disabled students or those studying part-time, online or at a partner organisation. Providers access specialist advice on accessible and inclusive learning space design that best meets the requirements of their students and suits their particular context. Assistive technologies can make methods of learning and teaching more accessible and productive to a wide range of students. Where possible, these are made available to all students through integrated organisation-wide systems rather than targeting limited subsets of learners.

Use of technology to enhance learning can be an important means of engaging students more fully with their studies. Providers develop technological facilities and services, including VLEs and library systems, which are accessible and inclusive and cater for a wide range of potential learner requirements. Systematic consultation with students and staff about the accessibility of technological facilities can enhance standards of usability. Providers also recognise the importance of digital literacy for staff and support their own development of digital skills.

See also Enabling Student Achievement Theme.

> **Reflective question**
>
> - What systems do you have in place to ensure suitable, high-quality learning environments? How applicable are they to all modes of study and delivery?

Monitoring, evaluation and reporting (Guiding principle 5)

Providers use a range of internal and external information and feedback from diverse sources, along with examples of sound practice and innovation, to review their strategic approach to learning and teaching (see also Monitoring and Evaluation Theme). This approach allows modification as appropriate and facilitates the continuous improvement of learning opportunities. It includes routine evaluation of quality from as close to the point of delivery as possible up to thematic and provider level.

Regular and systematic course monitoring evaluates the effectiveness of learning and teaching based on analysis of course (cohort) performance, including data on retention, progression and completion, and graduate employment. Cohort data are disaggregated by delivery mode and student characteristics to evaluate the impact of learning and teaching approaches on defined groups as evidence of inclusive learning and 'learning gain' (which can be described as the value added from entry through to successful exit). Periodic course review provides further potential for longitudinal analysis and evaluation.

Providers review student feedback on their learning opportunities, collected through a variety of internal means that may include:

- module and course evaluation
- academic appeals and complaints
- formal and informal staff/student meetings.

Providers operate staff performance review processes that include opportunities for observed teaching and/or peer review of teaching. Providers identify areas for individual or group development within course teams, academic departments, schools or faculties. Providers assure themselves of the effectiveness of staff development opportunities through systematic evaluation of their take up and impact, and the resources required to support them.

Providers monitor, review and evaluate the availability and quality of learning and teaching spaces and resources including the relevance and currency of facilities for the delivery of specialist professional/vocational courses. Providers monitor, review and evaluate the information provided to prospective and current students to ensure that it accurately describes the nature and balance of learning and teaching activities and resources on their courses.

Reflective question

- What routine monitoring, review and evaluation activity do you undertake on the availability and quality of learning and teaching spaces and resources?

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