



# **Changes to the Academic Infrastructure: final report**

**June 2011**

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## About this report

### Why is QAA publishing this document?

The Academic Infrastructure is a series of guidance documents (points of reference) published by QAA. It is used by institutions to ensure that their courses meet national expectations for academic standards, and that students have access to a suitable environment for learning (academic quality). Its technical definition is given in the footnote.<sup>1</sup>

Given the rapidly changing higher education landscape, QAA has evaluated the Academic Infrastructure to establish whether it is still fit for purpose. The findings of the evaluation suggested that it would benefit from being restructured, but without compromising its core purpose. In its revised form, as a new UK Quality Code for Higher Education, it will be better tailored to meet present and future challenges. This document sets out the format of the new UK Quality Code for Higher Education (2011).

Students and the wider public need and expect reassurance that academic standards and quality are comparable across all UK higher education providers. They need to know that quality and standards are maintained, and to feel confident that these are objectively and independently verified in ways that take account of current developments. The revised and strengthened Quality Code will address these concerns in clear terms. It will also clarify for higher education providers what is expected of them and provide guidance on good practice in setting and maintaining academic standards, assuring and enhancing quality and providing information about higher education.

### How did QAA arrive at the format of the Quality Code?

During 2009-10 QAA undertook an evaluation of the Academic Infrastructure to reflect on its use, impact and effectiveness. This drew on feedback from higher education professionals, students and other stakeholders. It considered whether the Academic Infrastructure:

- met and continued to meet its original expectations and anticipated benefits
- remained relevant and 'fit for purpose'
- was sufficiently flexible to accommodate future developments in higher education.

Details of the evaluation phase of the work and its findings can be found at:

[www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/evaluation10findings](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/evaluation10findings)

In response to the findings of the evaluation, QAA developed proposals for revising and restructuring the existing Academic Infrastructure into a 'UK Code of Practice for standards, quality and enhancement in higher education'. This would incorporate all the components of the existing Academic Infrastructure alongside some new elements.

These proposed changes were subject to a public consultation, which ran between 14 December 2010 and 1 March 2011. Details about the consultation can be found at:

[www.qaa.ac.uk/news/consultation/AI](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/news/consultation/AI).

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<sup>1</sup> The Academic Infrastructure is a set of UK-wide nationally agreed reference points which give all higher education providers a shared starting point for setting, describing and assuring the quality of the learning experience and standards of higher education awards or programme. It comprises the frameworks for higher education qualifications; subject benchmark statements; guidelines for programme specifications; and a *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* in 10 sections.

## What is the main purpose of this final report?

This final report analyses the responses to the consultation and draws conclusions about the future development of the Academic Infrastructure. It sets out in detail how QAA will undertake a programme of work to implement the changes, based on the responses to the consultation. This involves restructuring the Academic Infrastructure as the new UK Quality Code for Higher Education (2011).

The report explains why certain decisions have been taken, giving evidence from the responses received. It includes an outline format for the Quality Code (Appendix 1), a migration matrix showing how existing information will be incorporated into the Quality Code (Appendix 2) and a protocol for how the detail will be developed, revised and maintained in the future (Appendix 3).

## What is the new structure of the Quality Code?

The Academic Infrastructure will be restructured as the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code), in three parts:

- Part A: Setting and maintaining threshold academic standards
- Part B: Assuring and enhancing academic quality
- Part C: Providing information about higher education.

In Part B, new chapters will cover learning and teaching, student support (drawing on some existing elements) and student engagement.

## What are the key features of the new Quality Code?

The new Quality Code will make clear what is **expected** of all higher education providers, as well as providing guidance on **good practice** in setting and maintaining academic standards, assuring and enhancing academic quality, and providing information about higher education. It will be clearly structured, in three parts on standards, quality and information (as explained above). The proposed structure of these parts of the Quality Code, and their constituent chapters, is given in Appendix 1.

The Quality Code will retain much of the information and guidance included in the existing Academic Infrastructure, supplemented by new material. In addition to the stated expectations and associated guidance, it will address a range of overarching themes that are of particular relevance to students. These can be found on page 25 and 32. Among the issues addressed are students' diverse circumstances, modes of learning and employment needs, as well as their right to information about how their learning is planned, managed and assessed.

It is proposed that the first elements of the Quality Code to be developed will be the chapters in Part B on external examining, postgraduate research programmes, student engagement, and learning and teaching, and Part C on providing information about higher education. These are all topics on which there is currently a focus within higher education, and which have clear implications for the quality of education experienced by students.

## Overview of the responses to the consultation

The proposed changes to the Academic Infrastructure were designed to draw upon the strengths of the existing framework and to address the challenges for its future use, as identified in the evaluation exercise. Overall, the responses to the consultation have supported the proposals.

There were 139 responses to the consultation, via a dedicated email address and a SurveyMonkey electronic response form. A full list of respondents is given in Appendix 4. Table one indicates that responses were received from all areas of the UK higher education sector as well as from other stakeholders and individuals.

**Table 1: responses to the consultation (Spring 2011) compared with responses to the evaluation discussion paper (Spring 2010)**

Consultation responses	Written responses	Survey Monkey	Total	Responses to evaluation discussion paper
England HEI	55	15	<b>70</b>	70
Wales HEI	4	3	<b>7</b>	7
Scotland HEI	8	0	<b>8</b>	10
N Ireland HEI	2	0	<b>2</b>	2
FE College	4	2	<b>6</b>	8
Private providers	2	0	<b>2</b>	1
Student Union	0	2	<b>2</b>	0
PSRB	4	1	<b>5</b>	4
Other organisation	16	5	<b>21</b>	10
Individual	4	12	<b>16</b>	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>118</b>

The majority of the responses were from higher education institutions (HEIs). A minority of responses within the overall total came from individuals and other groups, such as further education colleges, professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs), and other organisations; separate analysis of these indicates that the views expressed appear to represent broadly the same range of views as those from the institutional respondents.

The consultation was supported through four roundtable discussion events held during January 2011 (in Glasgow, London, Cardiff, and at the National Union of Students headquarters in London). The events were attended by almost 150 delegates including academic and quality office staff and students' union officers from a broad range of higher education institutions across the UK, and representatives from professional, regulatory and statutory bodies, further education colleges and higher education representative organisations.

The events gave delegates an opportunity to consider the proposed changes to the Academic Infrastructure. They also provided feedback from the review of external examining that had taken place within the higher education sector, as well as a briefing on developments related to the information published by institutions. There was a chance to discuss these developments in the context of changes to the Academic Infrastructure.

All materials from the events (slides of presentations and the flipchart summaries of small group discussions) were published on the QAA website to enable organisations and individuals to draw upon them in making their formal consultation responses, at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/events/roundTable/Jan11](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/events/roundTable/Jan11).

Throughout the evaluation and the development of proposals to revise the Academic Infrastructure, QAA has been able to draw upon the advice of a specially convened UK-wide Sounding Board, made up of representatives of the higher education sector and other stakeholders. On 31 March 2011, the Sounding Board met to consider the responses received to the consultation.

The analysis that follows draws on the advice given by the Sounding Board at that meeting, at which the key issues emerging from the consultation were discussed.

## Analysis of the responses to the consultation

Almost all respondents answering via the SurveyMonkey electronic form ticked boxes 'yes', 'no', 'don't know' for each question, with most also providing some comments in free text boxes. Respondents providing written responses usually (though not without exception) commented in direct response to each of the questions, but did not always unambiguously state agreement or otherwise, although it was often possible to infer this from the text of their response.

In the following analysis of responses to the four consultation questions, where proportions or numbers of respondents are given, these are based on responses received via both methods. More general comments have been incorporated in the descriptive commentary, as appropriate. The analysis aims to give an indication of the volume of support among respondents for the views discussed, rather than absolute figures.

### Consultation question 1

For the purposes of the UK Code of Practice for standards, quality and enhancement, the following definitions will apply:

- **Threshold academic standards** are the level of achievement that a student has to reach to gain an academic award. For similar awards, the threshold level of achievement should be the same across the UK
- **Academic quality** is a way of describing how well the learning opportunities available to students are managed to help them to achieve their award. It is about making sure that appropriate and effective teaching, support, assessment and learning opportunities are provided for them.

Are these the appropriate definitions?

### Analysis

Three-quarters of respondents agreed that definitions of the terms 'threshold academic standards' and 'academic quality' should be provided for the Quality Code and that the definitions proposed were largely appropriate. Many respondents made suggestions for small amendments to the proposed definitions, and these are discussed further below. Where respondents disagreed with the proposed definitions, in some cases this was because the definitions were felt to be too closely aligned with QAA's external audit and review activity.

#### Illustrative comment:

The above definitions are broadly appropriate and helpful, providing clarification of these key terms. We are pleased with the emphasis within the new Code of Practice on threshold academic standards to be met for all higher education awards. This appropriately recognises the centrality of broad comparability of academic standards to effective national arrangements for managing academic quality and standards.

A number of respondents (both in answer to question 1 and elsewhere in their comments) suggested that a definition of enhancement should also be included, to support the prominent consideration of enhancement within the Quality Code. Some respondents suggested that the definition of academic quality could be extended to include enhancement, but other respondents noted that as quality enhancement was integral to quality assurance,

it was not necessary to define it separately. Respondents from higher education institutions in England and Northern Ireland often made reference in their response on this point to the introduction of a judgement on enhancement in the Institutional review method to be introduced in England and Northern Ireland from 2011-12, but responses from the UK as a whole had a similar profile.

**Illustrative comment:**

'Enhancement' is not defined despite being in the title. This is potentially a more controversial definition. Our view is that enhancement is not separate from quality and that any quality system should have continuous improvement as an integral part - hence the apparent difference between quality and enhancement is misleading.

Suggestions for amendments to the proposed definition of 'threshold academic standards' focused around several key terms:

- whether 'threshold' should be replaced or qualified with 'minimum'
- whether the terms 'similar' and 'same' could be replaced with 'equivalent' or 'comparable'
- whether 'award' could be replaced by 'qualification'.

Respondents also suggested that it would be helpful to incorporate an explanation about academic standards above the threshold and to link the definition directly to higher education qualifications frameworks.

In relation to the proposed definition of 'academic quality', several respondents questioned whether the definition should be of the process (the management of learning opportunities) or of the product (the learning opportunities themselves). Several suggestions were made for alternative terminology which made this clearer. On the whole, respondents supported the use of 'learning opportunities' rather than 'learning experience', but some alternative suggestions were made, including 'educational opportunities', 'learning provision' and 'academic opportunities'.

**QAA response**

**Discussion**

QAA acknowledges that respondents to the consultation welcomed a clear statement of the definitions of the terms 'threshold academic standards' and 'academic quality' which would apply to the Quality Code. The suggestions made by respondents for amendment to the proposed definitions have been carefully considered and discussed with the Academic Infrastructure Sounding Board.

In the definition of **threshold academic standards**, it is not felt necessary to use 'minimum' instead of, or in addition to, 'threshold'. 'Minimum' implies a low level, while a 'threshold' can be set at any point. However, in the second sentence of the proposed definition, 'similar' should be replaced with 'equivalent'. The replacement of 'same' with 'comparable' was considered, particularly in light of the terminology used in the context of the Bologna Process, but it was agreed that 'same' gives a clearer indication of the intended relationship between standards at the threshold level (which individual higher education providers may decide to exceed). 'Award' was felt to allow more scope than 'qualification', in terms of the full range of higher education provision, although it is recognised that there is less common understanding of the meaning of the term.



In the definition of **academic quality**, it is recognised that students and the wider audience are interested in the nature of the 'product' (learning opportunities themselves) rather than the 'process' (the management of those opportunities). Therefore the term 'managed' should be removed from the definition. This also reflects the direction taken in the recent development of the Institutional review method for higher education institutions in England and Northern Ireland. However, while 'learning experience' might be a more transparent term for a wider audience, it is important to make the distinction that while a higher education provider should be capable of guaranteeing the quality of the 'opportunities' it provides, it cannot guarantee how any particular student will 'experience' those opportunities.

Responses to the consultation indicated that a definition of 'enhancement' would be welcomed. Given the variety of definitions in use for QAA's review methods, it is more appropriate to include a **description** of what enhancement involves, in terms of improvement. It will be noted that it is necessary to have definitions for the purposes of monitoring; however these might change in future as review methods develop. The description will explain that improvement could occur at many different levels within an institution.

### **Outcome**

The following definitions will be used for the Quality Code:

**Threshold academic standards** are the level of achievement that a student has to reach to gain an academic award. For equivalent awards, the threshold level of achievement should be the same across the UK.

**Academic quality** is how well learning opportunities made available to students enable them to achieve their award. It is about making sure that appropriate and effective teaching, support, assessment and learning resources are provided for them.

A **description of enhancement** will also be included, which will explain that enhancement is the process by which institutions seek to systematically improve the quality of provision and the ways in which students' learning is supported. Definitions of enhancement are in place for the purposes of QAA's review methods.

## **Consultation question 2**

Do you agree that the components of the Academic Infrastructure should be restructured into the UK Code of Practice for standards, quality and enhancement? Will the new Code of Practice make clear the distinction between standards and quality?

### **Analysis**

The restructuring of the Academic Infrastructure into a single point of reference in the form of the Quality Code was strongly supported by over four-fifths of respondents. Many indicated that incorporation into a single document would be much easier to understand and explain. Where respondents answered 'no', they either questioned the need for restructuring on this scale at this time given financial constraints; suggested that the existing arrangements were adequate and changes would create confusion; or queried whether the proposals represented an intrusion into institutional autonomy.

### **Illustrative comment:**

Yes. This would help to identify it as a more consolidated and integrated body of information recognisable as unified framework. The organisation

into chapters will be very helpful in maintaining updates and currency and for ease of access of particular sections of information. The chapter 'headings' are appropriate and provide a good, chronologically-based organisation of the topics. The new topics are welcomed. The overarching topics for each chapter will be useful.

The organisation of the chapters of the Quality Code around the 'student journey' was welcomed. On the whole, respondents agreed that the division of the Quality Code into Part A: Setting and maintaining threshold academic standards and Part B: Assuring and enhancing academic quality was helpful and would help to make clear the distinction between standards and quality. However, a number of respondents noted that the distinction was artificial and there would inevitably be overlap between the two parts, although most indicated that this should not be taken as justification for not attempting the clearer arrangement.

**Illustrative comment:**

Separation of quality and standards has limited validity, given their inextricable relationship, but we recognise that there is a need to structure the document according to some clear principle. We recognise also that the proposed structure assists with the desire to make clear public statements concerning the range of activities carried out by the sector to maintain standards and maintain and enhance quality.

On the whole, respondents felt that the elements assigned to each part within the proposed structure were appropriate, but there were a few specific areas that were raised as needing further consideration.

- Assessment and external examining, which were referenced in the proposed structure in both Part A and Part B. Respondents suggested that this would create unnecessary confusion and overlap.
- Programme design, approval, monitoring and review, which were divided between Parts A and B. Several respondents explicitly supported the introduction of a separate chapter on programme design, noting that this was an important topic that deserved more attention.
- The location of accreditation of prior learning, which in the proposals had been incorporated with admissions. Several respondents suggested that it would be better linked with assessment.

Respondents broadly welcomed the proposed new chapters on learning and teaching, student support and student representation, although some respondents did question the scope of some of the chapters and the overall expanded size of the new Quality Code. It was suggested that areas that duplicate legislation could be removed, such as Section 3 of the current *Code of practice* on disabled students.

Several respondents commented that the chapter on student representation could be widened to consider student engagement more broadly, to recognise that students are active participants in their learning, with responsibilities, and are not just customers or consumers. A small number of respondents proposed the inclusion of a further additional chapter on employability, while others expressed concern that the role of careers education, information, advice and guidance might be lost with its incorporation into a broader chapter on student support.

On balance, respondents favoured incorporating the proposed chapters on international students and disabled students within the content of the other chapters, perhaps with

highlighted sections indicating where particular considerations apply. Several respondents noted that if the chapter on disabled students were retained, it should be widened to include equality and diversity more broadly.

**Illustrative comment:**

We are not yet entirely convinced of the necessity to devote whole chapters of the Code to the interests of specific groups of students. It may be better to identify in each chapter where it would be necessary to give attention to the additional/different needs of particular groups of students (for example international students) but we accept that this approach might lead to some chapters becoming overly complicated. We also feel that because all institutions are required to comply with relevant legislation, for example in relation to disabled students, care should be taken to ensure that institutions are allowed to determine for themselves how they meet legislative requirements. It would not be helpful for the Agency to specify how such requirements must be met but advice about how they could be met might be helpful.

The idea of setting out 'obligatory' elements within the Quality Code was generally supported by respondents, as long as it was made very clear which elements were obligatory, that these were agreed with the sector and were kept to a minimum, taking into account what was possible with current levels of resourcing. Several respondents emphasised the need not to lose the information contained in the existing Academic Infrastructure, particularly with regard to good practice.

**Illustrative comment:**

...while there are already elements and issues that are de facto minimum expectations, it is important that these...should be kept to those matters essential to ensuring that HEIs are appropriately exercising their responsibilities as awarding bodies. In other areas, the content of the revised Code should provide guidance and a reference point. The focus should be on the quality rather than the quantity of regulation. It is important that the language of the Code reflects the distinction between regulation and recommendation.

**QAA response**

**Discussion**

QAA notes the strong level of support for the proposed restructuring of the Academic Infrastructure into a single Quality Code. The detailed suggestions made by respondents for revisions and alterations to the proposed structure have been considered carefully and discussed with the Academic Infrastructure Sounding Board. In particular, it should be noted that each chapter will contain extensive referencing to work undertaken by other bodies such as the Higher Education Academy and the National Union of Students. It is not intended to duplicate this work, but the Quality Code does provide an opportunity to link together various sources of useful information and to state explicitly some points underpinning the quality assurance and enhancement of higher education.

**Assessment, external examining and accreditation of prior learning**

There is a distinction between assessment in terms of the award of a qualification (the entire award, where exam boards would be involved), which relates mainly to standards, and assessment of how a student has met specified learning outcomes, which relates more to quality and is the main focus of the topic. In a similar way, external examining, while fundamental to the maintenance of academic standards, is more broadly concerned with the

quality of learning opportunities. These topics will therefore be handled in the Quality Code by detailed cross referencing, with the main treatment in one place, in Part B. It will be explicitly recognised by explanation in the introduction to the Quality Code that a perfect solution in terms of structure is not possible because standards and quality are inextricably linked. Nevertheless, each chapter will attempt to make clear where the content applies particularly to standards or to quality, to produce a more helpful tool for providers in the context of external review.

On this principle, accreditation of prior learning would be considered within the chapter on assessment, with clear cross referencing from the chapter on admissions. While it is used in the context of the admission of non-standard applicants, the primary application of accreditation of prior learning is in determining equivalent achievement of learning outcomes, which may also be awarded credit.

### **Programme design, approval, monitoring and review**

The interrelationship between standards and quality is particularly acute in connection with these topics, which can only be handled by extensive cross referencing.

### **Employability and careers education, information, advice and guidance**

This is a crucial topic which is being increasingly highlighted in discussions about the future nature of higher education in the UK. There are implications for a number of the topics addressed in the Quality Code and therefore 'employability' will be added to the list of overarching themes that should be considered in each chapter. The title of the chapter on student support will be extended to include specific reference to careers information.

### **Chapters on specific groups of students**

While there are particular considerations in the provision and management of learning opportunities in relation to specific groups of students, on the whole it is sensible to consider these within the context of the wider topic and the student cohort as a whole. Moreover, this will enable a clearer focus on equality and diversity issues more broadly, rather than only on disabled students, reflecting developments in legislation (although the content of the current section on disabled students will not be lost, but embedded throughout the Quality Code).

The chapter on collaborative arrangements will focus on the management of this mode of provision, with any considerations particular to students studying through such arrangements similarly being highlighted within other chapters.

Postgraduate research students are following individually negotiated programmes involving original investigation undertaken in order to gain knowledge and understanding. There are a number of specific questions that apply to the management of research degree provision, which therefore will be considered in a separate chapter. In order that the specific needs of students following postgraduate taught programmes are not overlooked, this will be an overarching theme to be considered within each chapter.

### **Status and language**

QAA notes the support from respondents for designating certain aspects of the Quality Code as obligatory, as long as these are clearly identified and agreed with the sector. In order to make these elements clear, they will be set out as **expectations**. This term is intended to indicate that there are certain things that higher education providers in the UK expect of each other and which the general public can expect of all higher education providers.

This reflects the statement in the introduction to the current *Code of practice* that 'the precepts encapsulate the matters that an institution could reasonably be expected to address through its own quality assurance arrangements. The accompanying

guidance/explanation suggests possible ways by which those expectations might be met and demonstrated.'

There will be expectations throughout the Quality Code relating to both standards and quality, but it will be for the individual advisory groups for each chapter, under the oversight of the steering group, to decide what the expectations are in relation to each topic (it is not assumed that all current precepts will become expectations). QAA's external audit and review methods provide assurance that higher education providers are meeting the agreed expectations, with further details of the role of the relevant reference points provided in the handbooks for each method (which can be found at [www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews)).

### **Outcome**

An outline format for the Quality Code is set out in Appendix 1. It will be made up of three parts:

- Part A: Setting and maintaining threshold academic standards
- Part B: Assuring and enhancing academic quality
- Part C: Providing information about higher education.

Each chapter will set out the expectations of higher education providers.

Appendix 2 contains a matrix setting out the structure of the Quality Code and indicates how it is mapped to the content of the current Academic Infrastructure. An indicative programme of work for the development and revision of the individual chapters is also provided. In order to enable higher education providers to engage with the process of development and consider the implications for their own policies and procedures, a phased approach is proposed. Each advisory group will agree a detailed project plan for work on individual chapters, which will be published on QAA's website.

The protocol that will guide the process for the development or revision of each chapter is given at Appendix 3.

## **Consultation question 3**

The two areas highlighted for future work are the status of credit frameworks and provision of information at programme level. Do you agree that these should be priorities for future work? Do you agree that in due course the Code of Practice should include a Part C on Information?

### **Analysis**

#### **Credit frameworks**

Of respondents who answered this question, more than four-fifths agreed that the status of credit frameworks should be a priority area for future work. The reasons given by the small number of respondents who answered 'no' were generally that the current situation was acceptable. Some respondents pointed out that in Wales and Scotland integrated qualifications and credit frameworks were already in place and well embedded. However, respondents in these countries and elsewhere suggested that work to develop UK-wide guidelines on the use of existing frameworks would be welcome. A number of respondents stressed the importance of institutional autonomy in approaches to credit.

**Illustrative comment:**

We would support further work on the status of credit frameworks and their inclusion within the Code. Given the possible move towards greater movement of students between institutions, a possible move towards credit-based funding, the marketisation of HE (where price is already being seen as a proxy for quality) and diversification of providers of HE (FECs, private providers), greater clarification of the status of credit frameworks could be beneficial.

Some respondents indicated what they felt should be the focus of this programme of work. A number commented that QAA could usefully consider issues relating to credit transfer, to help address questions relating to student mobility, transferability and lifelong learning, but others stressed the importance of institutional autonomy to make the final decision on eligibility of credit for transfer. Some respondents noted that work could be done to ensure that transfer between different frameworks was possible (for example, from the National Qualifications Framework for vocational education). Several respondents highlighted the need for further work on the relationship between the UK and European frameworks, and the use of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS).

**Illustrative comment:**

A consistent approach from all HE institutions would avoid any potential confusion and enhance the understanding of students and the wider public. Providing sector-wide guidelines would safeguard choice for students where credit transfer will play an increasing role in transferability and lifelong learning opportunities.

A small number of respondents reiterated the finding from the evaluation that efforts should be made to produce an integrated qualifications and credit framework for England. Other respondents noted that this was unnecessary as it was already possible to use both frameworks together without difficulty, and was possibly undesirable because it could intrude on institutional flexibility. However, some respondents stated that as long as the use of credit was not obligatory, an integrated framework could be worth exploring. A small number of respondents suggested that the development of a standard set of level descriptors would be welcome.

**Information**

Over four-fifths of respondents who answered this question agreed that provision of information at a programme level should be a priority for future work for QAA. Three-quarters of respondents supported the proposal that the Quality Code should include a Part C on information. A number of respondents commented that this particularly needed to be a priority in light of current developments in the sector. However, despite the support expressed overall, a number of reservations about the implementation of the proposals were also noted. These generally related to other ongoing developments, particularly the introduction of a Key Information Set (KIS) and the need to avoid duplication, overlap or competing requirements.

**Illustrative comment:**

It is important to ensure that data from other agencies is referenced and linked, rather than duplicating here information which is already held on other sites.

Around one-third of respondents from higher education institutions in England and Northern Ireland explicitly noted that a clear, definitive reference point was needed against which a judgement could be made in the method of Institutional review to be introduced from 2011-12. On the whole, respondents felt that the reference point should form part of the

Quality Code. However, while respondents felt it would be sensible to have the requirements clearly presented in one place, several also indicated that it was important that this was not seen as an opportunity to increase the burden on institutions in terms of provision of information.

In contrast, a few institutions felt that the requirements for the provision of information for the purposes of audit or review were already sufficiently clear and coverage within the Quality Code would be duplication.

In supporting the inclusion of a Part C on information in the Quality Code, several respondents stated that this should be primarily a collection of references to other sources of requirement and guidance (such as the Key Information Set, student charters, UCAS entry profiles, the wider information set about higher education used in quality assurance and employability statements). Respondents felt that the value of a Part C was in being a single point of reference that linked other sources together and showed how the different sets of data maintained by institutions articulated. However, it was also noted that Part C of the Quality Code needed to have UK-wide applicability and to consider requirements relating to postgraduate students.

**Illustrative comment:**

We are conscious that the proposals for the KIS data set refer to information presented predominantly at the level of the programme of study for the benefit of those contemplating entering higher education. The information an institution publishes for its current students forms a second data set which complements the KIS data; and the information that will be contained in the Higher Education Achievement Record [sic], intended as a summative record of individual achievement for those who have completed their programme of study and wish to convey information to prospective employers, is a third set of data. Section C might usefully provide guidance for public consumption about how these data sets articulate and are integrated.

A number of respondents commented that the provision of information for prospective students, while an important issue, was not directly relevant to standards and quality. For some respondents, this meant that it should not be included with the Quality Code; for others, it was felt to be sufficiently closely related to be worth including.

A small number of respondents felt that provision of information was already adequately addressed within Part B of the Quality Code, through the overarching theme; moreover, communicating what learning opportunities were available should be an integral part of quality management. Given the context of the introduction of judgement on information in the new method of Institutional review for England and Northern Ireland, it should be noted that levels of support for a Part C from respondents from Scotland and Wales were comparable to those across respondents as a whole.

In relation to programme specifications, respondents reiterated the finding of the evaluation that they were generally of value as quality assurance documents and that information provided for students (both prospective and current) should be treated separately. Several respondents commented that the purpose and audience of information provided at programme level needed to be very clear (and one respondent noted that 'audience' could include programme designers or validation panels). It was suggested that the provision of information for quality assurance purposes could be suitably covered within regulations for programme design and approval.

**Illustrative comment:**

The purpose and consequently the design of the programme specification is overdue for revisiting. It will be helpful if its primary function is defined as a quality assurance tool and it will be necessary to ensure that the KIS and programme specification requirements both align and complement each other.

Regarding the provision of further contextual information to supplement the top-level information in the Key Information Set, some institutions welcomed the proposal to undertake developmental work to determine whether (and what) guidelines would be useful. It was suggested that this would be an opportunity to provide useful additional material such as statements of graduate attributes. However, a number of respondents also expressed reservations about the additional burden that the outcomes of this work could place on institutions. Several respondents explicitly noted that any such developmental work should not be carried out until the Key Information Set had been implemented and evaluated. Some respondents stressed that it could be difficult to reach a 'one size fits all' approach and stressed that institutions needed to retain autonomy in how they marketed themselves.

**Illustrative comment:**

Whilst the proposal for a KIS (Key Information Set) provides a framework it may be difficult to present course level data/information due to [the] way in which data is collected. Students are generally interested in course specific information, statistical data will provide a view of a particular course however real case studies of the student learning opportunities and experience would also provide prospective students with the information they seek.

**QAA response****Discussion**

QAA notes the broad support for further work on both credit frameworks and the provision of information at programme level, and for the inclusion in the Quality Code of a Part C on information. The need to ensure a UK-wide approach and the risk of duplication and overlap with other ongoing work in relation to information is also appreciated, while recognising that the provision of public information is a key concern in current policy debates about the future of higher education and support for student choice.

**Outcome**

Further work on the relationship between credit and qualifications frameworks will be undertaken during 2011-12.

The development of Part C of the Quality Code on information, including work on the provision of information at a programme level, will begin during 2011-12. This will allow the outcomes of work being undertaken elsewhere in the sector to be published - relating, in particular, to the Key Information Set and to the introduction of a judgement on published information in Institutional review for higher education institutions in England and Northern Ireland. It will also allow for the approach to be taken in the devolved administrations in response to these developments to become clear. An outline indication of the structure of Part C is given in Appendices 1 and 2.



## Consultation question 4

Will the UK Code of Practice make clear how UK higher education providers set and maintain threshold academic standards and assure and enhance academic quality? Is the name 'UK Code of Practice for standards, quality and enhancement in higher education' appropriate?

### Analysis

Approximately half of respondents agreed that the Quality Code would make clear how UK higher education providers set and maintain threshold academic standards and assure and enhance academic quality. The higher number of responses of 'no' or 'don't know' for this question than for the preceding questions reflected the fact that many respondents did not reject or disagree with the proposals, but indicated that they required further and more detailed information in order to comment fully.

Several respondents explicitly supported the intention that the Quality Code would be a tool for higher education providers, and several felt that the restructuring would make it more effective in that role. A considerable number of respondents indicated that it would be necessary to have other means for communicating the purpose and nature of the Quality Code to a wider audience, such as the proposed 'roadmap', an executive summary or a short introduction. However, a small number of respondents thought the restructured Quality Code would itself make clearer for the general public the expectations on higher education providers.

#### Illustrative comment:

We need a wholly different approach. The concept of threshold standards will not be easy for stakeholders to understand. We will need a strategy for putting this across ideally through communication with the public linked to their interest in the audit/review processes. Not though our Code of Practice for the sector. Half a side of A4 with the headlines, or a podcast will have more influence.

In commenting on the proposed name, almost no respondents felt that it was completely inappropriate. Generally, the criticism was that it was too long, although some respondents stated that it was long but accurate and would be shortened in use. A number of respondents explicitly noted that the proposed name was an improvement on the 'Academic Infrastructure', as it was more transparent.

The most common suggestion for change was to remove 'enhancement' from the title, to reflect the proposed two-part structure and the implicit link between quality assurance and quality enhancement. Some respondents asked how, or whether, the title would be amended to accommodate a Part C on information. The most commonly suggested alternative name was UK Code of Practice for Higher Education, or close variants.

Views of respondents were split in considering whether the designation 'code of practice' was appropriate, given its purpose, nature and content. Some respondents suggested that it was too prescriptive, and that 'framework', 'guide' or 'principles' would be more suitable. On the other hand, some respondents noted that 'framework' would be too regulatory, and that 'code of practice' adequately indicated that the content would have both obligatory and guidance elements. Several respondents suggested that 'code of practice' was a familiar concept in other sectors and would be intelligible to a non-specialist audience.

## QAA response

### Discussion

QAA accepts that it is difficult to be certain whether the proposed Quality Code will make clear how UK higher education providers set and maintain threshold academic standards and assure and enhance academic quality until its format has been agreed. However, the support expressed by respondents for the detailed proposals in consultation questions 1-3 indicates that the general direction is appropriate and that the Quality Code should be developed as a tool for higher education providers as they set and maintain threshold academic standards and assure and enhance academic quality.

The need for additional forms of communication about the purpose and nature of the Quality Code for a wider audience is recognised, and this will be addressed through several related strands of work. The overarching principles, which are derived from the recurrent themes in the existing Academic Infrastructure, will provide an accessible summary of the aims of the Quality Code.

Based on the mapping set out in Appendix 2, the content of the existing Academic Infrastructure will be migrated to the new format; this will be presented through a new web presentation enabling users to access the appropriate level of information they require.

In addition, QAA will work in partnership with NUS (both UK-wide and in the devolved nations) and other student organisations including WISE (Welsh Initiative for Student Engagement) and sparqs (student participation in quality Scotland), to develop a 'road map' to the quality assurance system, and a simple guide to the Quality Code. However, it is also important to avoid a proliferation of documents in different versions, as this is liable to create inconsistency and uncertainty about which forms the definitive point of reference.

It is recognised that a form of the title that is short, recognisable, descriptive and accurate is needed. Our research suggests that 'code of practice' is used widely across a number of different sectors to indicate a document that relevant bodies or individuals agree to follow. It is not used for statutory instruments requiring compliance, but generally to describe sets of expectations to be met. This suggests it is an appropriate term to use in this context, and will be more widely recognised and understood than 'Academic Infrastructure'. It is important that the name makes a link to the higher education sector and is distinguished from other generic codes of practice. In order to avoid confusion with the existing *Code of practice for the assurance of academic standards and quality in higher education*, '(2011)' will be appended to the title in written materials.

### Outcome

QAA will work with student representative organisations to develop a 'roadmap' and a simple guide, to improve communication about the Quality Code to a wider audience. In parallel, the content of the existing Academic Infrastructure will be migrated to the new format, and work on development and revision will be carried out as set out in the indicative programme of work (see Appendix 2).

The restructured Academic Infrastructure will be called the **UK Quality Code for Higher Education (2011)** and will contain, in due course, three parts:

- Part A: Setting and maintaining threshold academic standards
- Part B: Assuring and enhancing academic quality
- Part C: Providing information about higher education.

## Next steps

The third phase of work on the Academic Infrastructure is the implementation of the changes proposed by QAA and agreed with the higher education sector through the consultation.

The new overarching format for the **Quality Code** will need to be put in place quickly so that the detailed work on individual chapters can begin. A **steering group** will be established, which will have strategic oversight and coordinate work on the Quality Code as a whole. This will be made up of representatives from the higher education sector and other stakeholder groups, including student representatives, employers and professional, regulatory and statutory bodies, from all four countries of the UK. The membership is likely to include some members of the existing Academic Infrastructure Sounding Board.

A formal relationship between the steering group and the QAA Student Sounding Board will be established. The ultimate responsibility for the Quality Code will remain, as currently for the Academic Infrastructure, with the QAA Board; however a mechanism for formal reporting for information to the Quality in Higher Education Group and other relevant bodies in the devolved nations will also be put in place.

To inform the detail of each chapter of the Quality Code, separate **advisory groups** will be established, of practitioners and students who are experts in the topic of the chapter. It is intended to invite nominations from higher education providers and sector bodies for a 'pool of experts' from whom members of such groups can be drawn. The membership of each advisory group will be tailored to the topic of the chapter, and all groups will be able to draw upon the expertise of specialist sector bodies.

The work of each advisory group will be guided by an established **protocol**, which is published in Appendix 3, and will be coordinated by a QAA officer. The protocol includes a period of public consultation on the content of each chapter, which will provide all those with an interest in higher education with an opportunity to comment. The evaluation phase confirmed that the UK higher education sector has a sense of ownership of the current Academic Infrastructure and it is important that this is maintained through their contribution to, and influence on, the technical content of these reference points.

The steering group will provide guidance to, and draw on advice from, the individual expert advisory groups. It will be responsible for ensuring coordination between the work of the various advisory groups and for checking that the work of development and revision is completed in accordance with the protocol.

Meetings of the steering group will be held in September and January each year. At each September meeting, the group will review the work planned for the coming year and resolve any particular issues that arise from the chapters to be developed, for example with regard to format or the relationship between related topics. In January, the group will monitor the progress of chapters under development and outline plans for next year's work.

An **indicative programme of work** for the development of the Quality Code is given in Appendix 2. This programme will enable the steering group at its September 2013 meeting to consider the Quality Code as a whole and identify issues of overlap and consistency for resolution.

The first individual chapter to be developed will be the one on **external examining** (in response to the recommendations to be made in the report of the sector-led review, published in April 2011). Work on this chapter will run concurrently with the establishment of mechanisms for implementing the new format from summer 2011.

The chapter on **postgraduate research students** will also be a priority for early work, in order to take account of implications from the review of external examining in the context of postgraduate provision, and to provide updated guidance in the light of other developments (for example the replacement of the joint skills statement with the Researcher Development Statement, to which QAA has already agreed).

Work will begin in 2011-12 on the new chapters on **student engagement** and **learning and teaching**, with the latter closely followed by work on the chapter on **student support** to which it is closely related. Work on Part C on information will also begin during 2011-12, once the outcomes of other ongoing work are known.

In parallel with the revision and development of the chapters of the Quality Code, work will be underway on mechanisms for communicating its nature and purpose to a wider audience. QAA will work in partnership with NUS, WISE and sparqs to develop a 'roadmap' to the UK quality assurance system. This will be designed with and for students to illustrate how different quality assurance processes work together to provide a whole system underpinning UK higher education. In addition, a straightforward guide to the Quality Code will be produced, which will provide more information as a stepping stone to the technical content of the Quality Code itself. The development of a new website for the Quality Code will enable readers to access the appropriate level of detail they need.

The successful development and implementation of the Quality Code will benefit higher education providers, students and ultimately the public by providing a clearer and more secure mechanism for setting and maintaining academic standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of the student experience. Effective communication to the wider public will promote increased public confidence in the standards and quality of UK higher education provision.

# Appendix 1: Outline format for the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (2011)

## Introduction

<p><b>What is the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (2011)?</b>  XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX  XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX</p> <p><b>What does it do? What does it not do?</b></p> <table border="1" data-bbox="250 619 593 726"> <tr><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td></td><td></td></tr> </table> <p><b>Why do we need it?</b>  XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX  XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX</p> <p><b>What are expectations?</b>  XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX  XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX</p> <p><b>What is good practice?</b>  XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX  XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX</p>							<p><b>Overarching principles</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• students have the opportunity to contribute to the shaping of their learning experience</li> <li>• all students are treated fairly, equitably and as individuals</li> <li>• students are properly and actively informed at appropriate times of matters relevant to their programmes of study</li> <li>• all policies and processes relating to study and programmes are clear and transparent</li> <li>• strategic oversight of academic standards and academic quality is at the highest level of governance of the provider</li> <li>• all policies and processes are regularly and effectively monitored, reviewed and improved</li> <li>• sufficient and appropriate external involvement exists for the maintenance of quality and standards</li> <li>• staff are supported, enabling them in turn to support students' learning experience</li> </ul>	<p><b>How is this Quality Code organised?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Part A: Setting and maintaining threshold academic standards</li> <li>• Part B: Assuring and enhancing quality</li> <li>• Part C: Providing information about higher education</li> </ul> <p><b>Who is this Quality Code for?</b>  XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX  XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX</p> <p><b>What other resources might be useful?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Road map'</li> <li>• Student guide</li> <li>• Rough guides to qualifications</li> <li>• QAA Glossary of Terms</li> </ul>	<p><b>Standards and quality</b></p> <p><b>Threshold academic standards</b> are the level of achievement that a student has to reach to gain an academic award. For equivalent awards, the threshold level of achievement should be the same across the UK.</p> <p><b>Academic quality</b> is how well learning opportunities are made available to students to help them to achieve their award. It is about making sure that appropriate and effective teaching, support, assessment and learning resources are provided for them.</p> <p>(why the definitions/distinction is important)</p> <p>Description of <b>enhancement</b></p> <p>Explanation about <b>information</b></p> <p><b>How is this monitored?</b></p> <p>Explanation about internal and external quality assurance</p> <p><a href="http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews">www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews</a></p>

Note 1: the outline is provided **for illustrative purposes only**; the text of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (2011) is still to be developed, by QAA working with the sector-representative steering group and expert advisory groups.  
Note 2: the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (2011) will be primarily web-based; therefore, hyperlinks will enable navigation between chapters.

## Part A: Setting and maintaining threshold academic standards

### Threshold academic standards

Definition

#### Explanation

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX  
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

#### Introduction

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX  
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

### Chapter A1

#### The national level

**Expectation:** the threshold academic standard of all higher education awards is at least consistent with those set out in a named higher education qualifications framework

#### Explanation

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX  
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

#### Relevant links

[www.gaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/FHEQ/](http://www.gaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/FHEQ/)

#### Further information

- SCQF
- CQFW

### Chapter A2

#### The subject and qualification level

**Expectation:** all higher education programmes of study take account of relevant subject and qualification benchmark statements

#### Explanation

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX  
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

#### Relevant links

[www.gaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/](http://www.gaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/)

#### Further information

- Master's characteristics
- Doctoral characteristics

### Chapter A3

#### The programme level

**Expectation:** higher education providers make available definitive information on the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievements for a programme of study

#### Explanation

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX  
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

#### Relevant links

[www.gaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/programSpec/](http://www.gaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/programSpec/)

#### Further information

- Diploma supplement
- HEAR

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Note 2: the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (2011) will be primarily web-based; therefore, hyperlinks will enable navigation between chapters.

## Part B: Assuring and enhancing academic quality

**Academic quality**

Definition

**Description of enhancement**

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX  
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

**Introduction**

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX  
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

**Chapters in Part B**

- Programme design and approval
- Admissions
- Learning and teaching
- Student support, learning resources and careers education, information, advice and guidance
- Student engagement
- Assessment of students and accreditation of prior learning
- External examining
- Programme monitoring and review
- Complaints and appeals
- Management of collaborative arrangements
- Postgraduate research programmes

**Overarching themes**

- how information about the topic is communicated to students and other relevant audiences
- how the employability of students can be addressed in relation to the topic
- that equality and diversity issues have been embedded throughout
- how the topic relates to all the diverse needs of students, in particular
  - non-traditional learners (for example, work-based learners, part-time students), drawing on Section 9 of the existing *Code of practice* where necessary
  - international students
  - postgraduate taught students
  - disabled students, drawing on Section 3 of the existing *Code of practice* where necessary
- how the responsibilities of awarding bodies and other higher education providers differ in relation to the topic
- that the content of the chapter considers where the situation might differ in the four countries of the UK and makes this clear
- that the content of the chapter aligns with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area and other European and international higher education reference points as appropriate
- how good practice and enhancement relate to the topic, including reference to relevant publications such as Enhancement Themes and Outcomes papers and work by the Higher Education Academy

**Chapter B1**

**Programme design and approval**

**Expectation:** higher education providers have processes for the design and approval of programmes

**Explanation**

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX  
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

**Relevant links**

[www.gaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/codeOfPractice/section7/programmedesign.pdf](http://www.gaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/codeOfPractice/section7/programmedesign.pdf)

**Cross referenced to:**

- Part A chapter A1
- Part A chapter A2
- Part A chapter A3
- Part A chapter A4

**Further information**

- XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

**Chapter B1 Appendix**

**Programme design and approval**

Expectation	Standards	Quality
XXXXXXXXXX	✓	
XXXXXXXXXX	✓	✓
XXXXXXXXXX		✓

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Note 2: the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (2011) will be primarily web-based; therefore, hyperlinks will enable navigation between chapters.

## Part C: Providing information about higher education

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<p><b>Information</b></p> <p>Explanation</p> <p><b>Introduction</b></p> <p>XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX</p> <p><b>Chapters in Part C</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Information: prospective students</li><li>• Information: during study</li><li>• Information: after study</li><li>• Information: for assuring standards and quality</li></ul>	<p><b>Chapter C1</b></p> <p><b>Information: prospective students</b></p> <p><b>Expectation:</b> XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXXXX</p> <p><b>Explanation</b></p> <p>XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX</p> <p><b>Relevant links</b></p> <p><a href="http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/programSpec/">www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/programSpec/</a></p> <p><b>Cross referenced to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Part A chapter A3</li><li>• Part B chapter B2</li></ul> <p><b>Further information</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Key Information Sets</li><li>• UCAS Entry Profiles</li></ul>
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Note 1: the outline is provided **for illustrative purposes only**; the text of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (2011) is still to be developed, by QAA working with the sector-representative steering group and expert advisory groups.

Note 2: the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (2011) will be primarily web-based; therefore, hyperlinks will enable navigation between chapters.



## Appendix 2: Migration matrix for developing the UK Quality Code for Higher Education

This matrix indicates how the content of the existing Academic Infrastructure maps to the new UK Quality Code for Higher Education (2011). References given in the column 'Further information and additional references' are not part of the current Academic Infrastructure, but have been identified as useful additional material for higher education providers. As each chapter is developed by an expert advisory group, the status of these materials (and others not listed) in relation to the Quality Code can be reconsidered, and the views of the higher education sector more broadly sought through public consultation. This column also indicates where the chapter is closely related and therefore cross referenced to another chapter of the Quality Code.

Information given in the column 'Future work and indicative timescales' is **indicative**. Political and policy developments among other factors may make it necessary to revise the programme of work indicated here. The responsibility for reviewing and revising this programme of work if necessary rests with the Steering Group for the Quality Code. Each advisory group will agree a detailed project plan for work on individual chapters, which will be published on QAA's website.

The text of the suggested expectations has been derived where possible from statements in the existing Academic Infrastructure. The exact wording of the expectations will be agreed by the steering group at its meeting in September 2011. Detailed expectations for each chapter will be developed by individual advisory groups.

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### Overarching principles

The overarching principles are derived from the recurrent themes in the existing Academic Infrastructure and provide an accessible summary of the aims of the Quality Code.

- Students have the opportunity to contribute to the shaping of their learning experience.
- All students are treated fairly, equitably and as individuals.
- 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 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 quality and standards.
- Staff are supported, enabling them in turn to support students' learning experience.

Note 1: The UK Quality Code for Higher Education (2011) applies to all higher education providers in the UK; for its application to specific external review methods operated by QAA, see individual method handbooks at [www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews). Expectations in the Quality Code apply to all higher education providers, but individual providers are expected to exercise their powers as degree awarding bodies in a proper manner.

Note 2: There are a number of overarching themes which are considered in each chapter. These are listed at the end of the table.

<b>Part A: Setting and maintaining threshold academic standards</b>				
	<b>Chapter and suggested expectation</b>	<b>Mapped primarily to existing content</b>	<b>Further information and additional references</b>	<b>Future work and indicative timescales</b>
A1	<p>The national level</p> <p><b>Expectation:</b> The threshold academic standard of all higher education awards is at least consistent with those set out in a named higher education qualifications framework</p>	<p><i>The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)</i></p> <p><i>The framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland (FQHES)</i></p>	<p>Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)</p> <p>Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW)</p> <p><i>Higher education credit framework for England</i></p> <p>Qualifications and Credit Framework</p> <p><i>The framework for qualifications of the European higher education area (FQ-EHEA)</i></p>	<p>We do not intend to revise the qualifications frameworks, which are well established</p> <p>Discussions about the relationship between credit and qualifications frameworks will begin in 2011-12</p>
A2	<p>The subject and qualification level</p> <p><b>Expectation:</b> All higher education programmes of study take account of relevant subject and qualification benchmark statements.</p>	<p>Subject benchmark statements</p> <p><i>Foundation Degree qualification benchmark</i></p>	<p>Master's degree characteristics publication</p> <p>Doctoral degree characteristics publication (currently in draft)</p> <p>Recognition scheme for subject benchmark statements</p>	<p>The subject and qualification benchmark statements will be revised within the normal pattern of review and revision, and the development of new statements within the terms of the Recognition scheme will continue</p>

Note 1: The UK Quality Code for Higher Education (2011) applies to all higher education providers in the UK; for its application to specific external review methods operated by QAA, see individual method handbooks at [www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews). Expectations in the Quality Code apply to all higher education providers, but individual providers are expected to exercise their powers as degree awarding bodies in a proper manner.

Note 2: There are a number of overarching themes which are considered in each chapter. These are listed at the end of the table.

A3	<p>The programme level</p> <p><b>Expectation:</b> Higher education providers make available definitive information on the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievements for a programme of study</p>	<p>Relevant parts of the <i>Guidelines for preparing programme specifications</i></p> <p>Parts of existing <i>Code of practice</i>, Section 7</p>	<p>Part C: Providing information about higher education</p> <p>Institutional transcripts</p> <p>Diploma supplement</p> <p>Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR)</p>	<p>Work on Part C: Providing information about higher education to start 2011-12, and will include revisiting the <i>Guidelines for preparing programme specifications</i></p>
A4	<p>Approval and review</p> <p><b>Expectation:</b> Higher education providers have in place effective processes to approve and periodically review the validity and relevance of programmes</p>	<p>Parts of existing <i>Code of practice</i>, Section 7</p>	<p>Cross referenced to Part B chapter B1: Programme design and approval and Part B chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review</p>	<p>Part B chapters B1 and B8 to be revised 2012-13</p>
A5	<p>Externality</p> <p><b>Expectation:</b> Higher education providers ensure independent and external participation in the management of threshold academic standards</p>	<p>Existing <i>Code of practice</i>, Section 4</p> <p>Parts of existing <i>Code of practice</i>, Section 7</p>	<p>Cross referenced to Part B chapter B1: Programme design and approval, Part B chapter B7: External examining and Part B chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review</p>	<p>Part B chapter B7 to be revised 2011-12, starting May 2010-11</p> <p>Part B chapters B1 and B8 to be revised 2012-13</p>
A6	<p>Assessment of achievement of learning outcomes</p> <p><b>Expectation:</b> Higher education providers ensure the assessment of students is robust, valid and reliable and that the award of qualifications and credit are based on the achievement of the</p>	<p>Existing <i>Code of practice</i>, Section 6</p>	<p>Cross referenced to Part B chapter B6: Assessment, Part C: Providing information about higher education</p> <p>Institutional transcripts</p> <p>Diploma supplement</p>	<p>Part B chapter B6 to be revised 2012-13</p> <p>Work on Part C: Providing information about higher education to start 2011-12</p>

Note 1: The UK Quality Code for Higher Education (2011) applies to all higher education providers in the UK; for its application to specific external review methods operated by QAA, see individual method handbooks at [www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews). Expectations in the Quality Code apply to all higher education providers, but individual providers are expected to exercise their powers as degree awarding bodies in a proper manner.

Note 2: There are a number of overarching themes which are considered in each chapter. These are listed at the end of the table.

	intended learning outcomes		Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR)	
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<b>Part B: Assuring and enhancing academic quality</b>				
	<b>Chapter and suggested expectation</b>	<b>Mapped primarily to existing content</b>	<b>Further information and additional references</b>	<b>Future work and indicative timescales</b>
B1	Programme design and approval  <b>Expectation:</b> Higher education providers have effective processes for the design and approval of programmes	Parts of existing <i>Code of practice</i> , Section 7	Part A chapter A1: The national level  Part A chapter A2: The subject and qualification level  Part A chapter A3: The programme level  Part A chapter A4: Approval and review	Work on revision to start 2012-13  Chapters B1 and B8 will be considered together and may be developed as a single chapter
B2	Admissions  <b>Expectation:</b> Higher education providers have appropriate processes for the recruitment and admission of students	Existing <i>Code of practice</i> , Section 10	Part C Information: Prospective students  Part B chapter B6: Assessment (accreditation of prior learning)	Work on revision to start 2012-13  Work on Part C: Providing information about higher education to start 2011-12
B3	Learning and teaching  <b>Expectation:</b> Higher education providers implement appropriate strategies in place for learning and teaching	Existing <i>Code of practice</i> , Section 2 Part B	Part B chapter B1: Programme design and approval  Part B chapter B4: Student support  Part B chapter B6: Assessment	Work on development to start 2011-12 (January 2012)

Note 1: The UK Quality Code for Higher Education (2011) applies to all higher education providers in the UK; for its application to specific external review methods operated by QAA, see individual method handbooks at [www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews). Expectations in the Quality Code apply to all higher education providers, but individual providers are expected to exercise their powers as degree awarding bodies in a proper manner.

Note 2: There are a number of overarching themes which are considered in each chapter. These are listed at the end of the table.

			<p><i>Personal development planning: guidelines for institutional policy and practice in higher education</i></p> <p>UK Professional Standards Framework</p> <p>Higher Education Academy resources</p>	
B4	<p>Student support, learning resources and careers education, information, advice and guidance</p> <p><b>Expectation:</b> Higher education providers have effective arrangements in place to support students in their learning</p>	<p>Existing <i>Code of practice</i> Section 8</p> <p>Existing <i>Code of practice</i> Section 9</p>	<p>Part B chapter B3: Learning and teaching</p> <p><i>Personal development planning: guidelines for institutional policy and practice in higher education</i></p>	<p>Work on revision and development to follow on from work on B3, with overlap in membership of advisory groups</p>
B5	<p>Student engagement</p> <p><b>Expectation:</b> Higher education providers have appropriate arrangements in place to enable students to contribute to the shaping of their learning experience</p>		<p>Student charter group: final report</p> <p>Higher Education Academy resources</p> <p>Resources produced by NUS, WISE and sparqs</p>	<p>Work on development to start 2011-12 (November 2011)</p>
B6	<p>Assessment of students and accreditation of prior learning</p> <p><b>Expectation:</b> Higher education providers ensure that learners</p>	<p>Existing <i>Code of practice</i>, Section 6</p>	<p><i>Guidelines on the accreditation of prior learning</i></p> <p>Part A chapter A6: Assessment of</p>	<p>Work on revision to start 2012-13</p> <p>This will include consideration of whether the</p>

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Note 2: There are a number of overarching themes which are considered in each chapter. These are listed at the end of the table.

	have appropriate opportunities to show they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the award of a qualification or credit		achievement of learning outcomes  Part B chapter B3: Learning and teaching  Part B chapter B7: External examining  Higher Education Academy resources	APL Guidelines, currently for England, Wales and Northern Ireland, can be incorporated within the Quality Code
B7	External examining  <b>Expectation:</b> Higher education providers make appropriate use of external examining arrangements.	Existing <i>Code of practice</i> , Section 4	Part A chapter A5: Externality  Part B chapter B6: Assessment  Recommendations from the sector-led review of external examining	Work on revision to start 2010-11 (May 2011)
B8	Programme monitoring and review  <b>Expectation:</b> Higher education providers have effective processes in place to routinely monitor and periodically review programmes	Parts of existing <i>Code of practice</i> , Section 7	Part A chapter A4: Approval and review  Part B chapter B1: Programme design and approval	Work on revision to start 2012-13. See note on B1 above
B9	Complaints and appeals  <b>Expectation:</b> Higher education providers have fair, effective and timely procedures for handling students' complaints and academic appeals	Existing <i>Code of practice</i> , Section 5	<i>Raising concerns about standards and quality in higher education</i>  <i>Protocol for managing potential risks to quality and academic standards</i>	Work on revision to start 2012-13

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			Materials produced by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education and the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman	
<b>Additional chapters</b>				
B10	Management of collaborative arrangements  <b>Expectation:</b> Higher education providers have effective processes for management of collaborative provision	Existing <i>Code of practice</i> , Section 2 Part A and its amplification (2010)		Work on revision to start 2011-12 (April 2012)
B11	Postgraduate research programmes  <b>Expectation:</b> Higher education providers have appropriate arrangements to manage postgraduate research programmes	Existing <i>Code of practice</i> , Section 1	Researcher Development Statement  EUA CDE Salzburg principles	Work on revision to start 2011-12 (September 2011)
	Disabled students	Existing <i>Code of practice</i> , Section 3		Section 3 will remain available as a reference point until the work on all chapters of the Quality Code has been completed and its contents embedded within the individual topics

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Note 2: There are a number of overarching themes which are considered in each chapter. These are listed at the end of the table.

### Overarching themes

Within each chapter the following will be considered:

- how information about the topic is communicated to students and other relevant audiences
- how the employability of students can be addressed in relation to the topic
- that equality and diversity issues have been embedded throughout
- how the topic relates to all the diverse needs of students, in particular
  - non-traditional learners (for example work-based learners, part-time students), drawing on Section 9 of the existing *Code of practice* where necessary
  - international students
  - postgraduate taught students
  - disabled students, drawing on Section 3 of the existing *Code of practice* where necessary
- how the responsibilities of awarding bodies and other higher education providers differ in relation to the topic
- that the content of the chapter considers where the situation might differ in the four countries of the UK and makes this clear
- that the content of the chapter aligns with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* and other European and international higher education reference points as appropriate
- how good practice and enhancement relate to the topic, including reference to relevant publications such as Enhancement Themes and *Outcomes* papers and work by the Higher Education Academy.

Note 1: The UK Quality Code for Higher Education (2011) applies to all higher education providers in the UK; for its application to specific external review methods operated by QAA, see individual method handbooks at [www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews). Expectations in the Quality Code apply to all higher education providers, but individual providers are expected to exercise their powers as degree awarding bodies in a proper manner.

Note 2: There are a number of overarching themes which are considered in each chapter. These are listed at the end of the table.



<b>Part C: Providing information about higher education</b>				
	<b>Chapter and suggested expectation</b>	<b>Mapped primarily to existing content</b>	<b>Further information and additional references</b>	<b>Future work and indicative timescales</b>
C1	Information: Prospective students	Relevant parts of the <i>Guidelines for preparing programme specifications</i>	Part A chapter A3: The programme level  Part B chapter B2: Admissions  Key Information Set	Work on Part C: Providing information about higher education to start 2011-12
C2	Information: During study	Relevant parts of the <i>Guidelines for preparing programme specifications</i>	Part B chapter B3: Learning and teaching  Part B chapter B4: Student support  Student Charter Group: Final report	
C3	Information: After study		Part A chapter A6: Assessment of the achievement of learning outcomes  Institutional transcripts  Diploma supplement  Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR)	
C4	Information: For assuring standards and quality		Relevant review method handbooks HEFCE 2006/45	

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Note 2: There are a number of overarching themes which are considered in each chapter. These are listed at the end of the table.

## Appendix 3: Protocol for developing the Quality Code

Each part and/or chapter of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (2011) will be developed by QAA with the help of an advisory group representative of the sector, and through consultation with the wider higher education sector and other relevant stakeholders. This is a continuation of the method used to develop and revise the components of the existing Academic Infrastructure.

This protocol must be followed by each advisory group. The steering group for the Quality Code is responsible for ensuring that the protocol is followed and for overall oversight and coordination of the development of the Quality Code.

The Quality Code is the definitive point of reference for all providers of higher education in the UK. QAA maintains stewardship of the Quality Code on behalf of the higher education sector. This protocol sets out how it will be developed and maintained.

The Quality Code does **not** incorporate statutory requirements relating to relevant legislation. It assumes that higher education providers have an overriding obligation in all cases to ensure they meet the requirements of legislation. However, where the Quality Code relates to legislative or similar obligations, efforts must be made to ensure compatibility.

The development and/or revision of each part and/or chapter of the Quality Code will be coordinated by a QAA officer supported by an advisory group. This advisory group will be made up of practitioners and students who are experts on the topic of the chapter. The advisory group will always include at least one student representative and/or an officer from the National Union of Students. It will also include one practitioner who as well as being an expert on the topic of the chapter, has experience and knowledge of equality and diversity issues, and one practitioner or other representative with expertise in European and international developments in higher education.

Higher education providers and other sector representative bodies will be invited to nominate experts on the topics of the chapters/parts of the Quality Code, from whom members of advisory groups may be drawn. However, QAA reserves the right to approach individuals directly in order to ensure any single advisory group has the right balance of expertise. Wherever possible, an advisory group will represent the four nations of the UK and different types of higher education provider. The oversight role of the representative steering group will also ensure that all relevant interests are taken into account.

The work of QAA and the advisory group in developing or revising a chapter of the Quality Code will be supported by a public consultation with the higher education sector and other stakeholders with an interest in higher education, carried out in accordance with QAA's consultation policy ([www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/policy/consultations/policy.asp](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/policy/consultations/policy.asp)).

It is anticipated that the process of developing and/or revising a chapter of the Quality Code will take, on average, one academic year to complete. As each chapter is initially developed, drawing on the existing components of the Academic Infrastructure, each advisory group will need to identify which elements of the topic relate to the setting and maintenance of academic standards and which relate to the assurance and enhancement of academic quality so that this can be clearly indicated in the Appendix to the chapter.

Each chapter will be developed to a common format, which makes clear what is expected of all higher education providers. Expectations express key matters that the higher education sector through the advisory group has identified as important for setting and maintaining threshold academic standards and/or assuring and enhancing academic quality. Individual

higher education providers should be able to demonstrate that they are tackling the expectations effectively through their management and organisational processes, taking account of institutional needs, traditions, culture and decision-making. Accompanying explanations show why the expectations are important and, where possible, give examples of ways in which the expectation can be met.

Chapters in Part B should be capable of standing alone, and all chapters should be organised around the 'student journey' or some other reasonable structure.

As each chapter is developed and/or revised, the advisory group must assure themselves that the following principles that underlie the whole Quality Code are addressed in ways appropriate to the specific topic of the chapter.

- Students have the opportunity to contribute to the shaping of their learning experience.
- All students are treated fairly, equitably and as individuals.
- Students are properly and actively informed at appropriate times of matters relevant to their programme 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 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 quality and standards.
- Staff are supported, enabling them in turn to support students' learning experience.

In addition, the advisory group will need to ensure that the following overarching themes have been considered and addressed as appropriate.

Within each chapter the following will be considered:

- how information about the topic is communicated to students and other relevant audiences
- how the employability of students can be addressed in relation to the topic
- that equality and diversity issues have been embedded throughout
- how the topic relates to all the diverse needs of students, in particular
  - non-traditional learners (for example work-based learners, part-time students), drawing on Section 9 of the existing *Code of practice* where necessary
  - international students
  - postgraduate taught students
  - disabled students, drawing on Section 3 of the existing *Code of practice* where necessary
- how the responsibilities of awarding bodies and other higher education providers differ in relation to the topic
- that the content of the chapter considers where the situation might differ in the four countries of the UK and makes this clear
- that the content of the chapter aligns with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* and other European and international higher education reference points as appropriate
- how good practice and enhancement relate to the topic, including reference to relevant publications such as Enhancement Themes and *Outcomes* papers and work by the Higher Education Academy.

## Appendix 4: List of respondents to the consultation

The following list excludes 16 responses received from individuals.

1994 Group  
AMOSSHE, the Student Services Organisation  
Ashridge  
Association of Business Schools  
Association of Colleges  
Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services  
Aston University  
Bangor University  
Birmingham City University  
Blackpool and The Fylde College  
Bournemouth University  
British Sociological Association  
Brunel University  
Cardiff University  
City University  
Council of Validating Universities  
De Montfort University  
Durham University  
Edge Hill University  
Edinburgh Napier University  
Engineering Council  
Goldsmiths, University of London  
GuildHE Quality Management Network  
Herriot-Watt University  
Higher Education Academy  
Higher Education Funding Council for England  
ifs School of Finance  
Imperial College London  
Institute of Cancer Research  
Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales  
Institute of Education  
Institute of Physics  
Kingston University  
Lancaster University  
Landex  
Leading Curriculum Change for Sustainability: Strategic Approaches to Quality Enhancement project  
Leeds Metropolitan University  
Leeds Trinity University College  
Liverpool John Moores University  
London School of Economics and Political Science  
Loughborough University  
Manchester Metropolitan University  
Mixed Economy Group  
National Union of Students  
New College Durham  
Newcastle College  
Newcastle University  
Northumbria University  
Nottingham Trent University  
Open University  
Oxford Brookes University  
Quality Assurance and Quality Enhancement in e-learning Special Interest Group  
Quality Strategy Network  
Queen's University Belfast  
Ravensbourne College  
Roehampton University  
Rose Bruford College  
Royal Agricultural College  
Sheffield Hallam University  
Sheffield Hallam University Students' Union  
Solicitors Regulation Authority  
Southampton Solent University  
Sparsholt College  
St Helens College  
Staff and Educational Development Association  
Staffordshire University  
SummitSkills  
University of Sunderland  
Supporting Professionalism in Admissions  
Swansea Metropolitan University  
Swansea University  
Teesside University  
The Manchester College  
The University of Manchester Students' Union  
UK Deans of Science  
Universities Scotland  
University and College Union  
University College London  
University for the Creative Arts  
University of Aberdeen  
University of Bath  
University of Birmingham  
University of Bolton  
University of Bradford  
University of Brighton  
University of Bristol  
University of Cambridge  
University of Central Lancashire

University of Derby  
University of East Anglia  
University of East London  
University of Edinburgh  
University of Exeter  
University of Glamorgan  
University of Glasgow  
University of Gloucestershire  
University of Hertfordshire  
University of Huddersfield  
University of Hull  
University of Kent  
University of Leeds  
University of Leicester  
University of Lincoln  
University of Liverpool  
University of Northampton  
University of Nottingham  
University of Oxford  
University of Plymouth  
University of Portsmouth  
University of Sheffield  
University of St Andrews  
University of Strathclyde  
University of Surrey  
University of the Arts London  
University of the West of Scotland  
University of Ulster  
University of Wales  
University of Wales, Newport  
University of Warwick  
University of Westminster  
University of Worcester  
University of York  
York St John University

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