



WONKHE

MAKING SENSE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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What is academic quality and how do we know it's happening?

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Quality: the basics

Quality: the education environment is configured in such a way as to give students a decent chance of success

Standards: the threshold of competence students must meet to be awarded a qualification

Universities are responsible for maintaining academic quality and standards at or above a national baseline

Regulators are responsible for making sure they are doing this – via the Quality Assurance Agency

Get it **right** and you have something called "the UK's world-leading HE system"

Get it **wrong** and you have total collapse in confidence in the legitimacy of UK HE



The UK Quality Code

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

Quality: the politics

“In this new era of choice students don’t have to settle for **poor value**. How else can we guarantee that students get the **best possible experience** from their studies, one that prepares them for adult life and which also represents good value for money?

In one word, it is quality.

Quality is what **sets our universities apart** from the rest of world’s.

Quality is what will deliver a **meaningful qualification** that offers the **right skills** and **preparation for a working life**. And quality is what will justify the huge **investment** that students are making to study.

But quality covers more than teaching. Quality extends to the **value of the degree**. You represent the best of the best but to keep that reputation for excellence, you must be vigilant in showing that the degrees awarded to students are a **reliable indicator of academic achievement**.

And **not all degrees are created equal**.

There have been too many instances where **pockets of low quality** have undermined the **teaching** or **value for money** that students and taxpayers rightly expect.”



Gavin Williamson:
Secretary of State
for Education
2019-21

Speech to
Universities UK
conference 2021

From inputs, via processes, to outcomes

Inputs

Staff/student ratio
Class sizes
Learning resources
University estate
Expert professors
Contact hours
Extra-curricular opportunities

Well-prepared students

Processes

Pedagogy (how courses are taught)
Teaching development
Student representation
Student complaints systems
Assessment and feedback
Academic and welfare support
Quality review and enhancement

Student learning engagement and effort

Outcomes

Student achievement
Student continuation, progression, and completion
Graduate employment
Graduate salary
Student satisfaction (NSS)
Complaints upheld
University league table position

“Education gain”



Difficult questions

Which metrics are legitimate to use in the assessment of quality?

Who should be involved in making judgements about quality – academics, quality professionals, students?

How should quality assessment inform student choice of course?

What level should quality be assessed – course, subject, university?

What should happen in the case of “poor quality” – and when?

How should quality be improved?

What’s the balance between protecting the “world leading” reputation of UK HE and calling out poor quality?



What's happening right now

The Office for Students is setting minimum thresholds for student retention, completion, and progression to graduate-level employment

Publication of outcome data by subject and student demographic

The updated Teaching Excellence Framework is proposing to assess institutional teaching quality above the baseline threshold through a combination of outcome and process measures – linked by institutional evidence

The National Student Survey is under review and likely to change for 2023 to incorporate a wider range of regulatory preoccupations (eg safety, freedom of speech)

Post-pandemic BIG questions about digitally-enabled learning, assessment, and inclusion



Next up

What does HE cost – and who should pay? - auditorium

Why it is hard to change things in universities – room B

Will technology save us? – room C

Student voice and what it can tell us – room A

