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

Debbie McVitty
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
<table>
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<th>Core practices</th>
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<td>The provider ensures that the threshold standards for its qualifications are consistent with the relevant national qualifications frameworks. The provider ensures that students who are awarded qualifications have the opportunity to achieve standards beyond the threshold level that are reasonably comparable with those achieved in other UK providers. Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the standards of its awards are credible and secure irrespective of where or how courses are delivered or who delivers them. The provider uses external expertise, assessment and classification processes that are reliable, fair and transparent.</td>
<td>The provider reviews its core practices for standards regularly and uses the outcomes to drive improvement and enhancement.</td>
<td>The provider has a reliable, fair and inclusive admissions system. The provider designs and/or delivers high-quality courses. The provider has sufficient appropriately qualified and skilled staff to deliver a high-quality academic experience. The provider has sufficient and appropriate facilities, learning resources and student support services to deliver a high-quality academic experience. The provider actively engages students, individually and collectively, in the quality of their educational experience. The provider has fair and transparent procedures for handling complaints and appeals which are accessible to all students. Where the provider offers research degrees, it delivers these in appropriate and supportive research environments. Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the academic experience is high-quality irrespective of where or how courses are delivered and who delivers them. The provider supports all students to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes.</td>
<td>The provider’s approach to managing quality takes account of external expertise. The provider engages students individually and collectively in the development, assurance and enhancement of the quality of their educational experience.</td>
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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.”
## From inputs, via processes, to outcomes

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<td>Well-prepared students</td>
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<td>“Education gain”</td>
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**Notes:**
- **Inputs** are the resources and conditions provided to educational institutions.
- **Processes** are the methods and activities used to deliver educational outcomes.
- **Outcomes** are the results and measures of educational success.
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 (e.g., 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