

The new definitions of HE quality in England

What they say, why they matter and how SUs and students can use them

JIM DICKINSON, WONKHE SUs



WONKHE
SUs

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Quality

- Feed back about your course...
- “Teaching is great, feedback is great, but the content doesn’t seem to relate to the field I want to go into and the material doesn’t seem to be up to date
 - Do students blame themselves or realise they have rights to challenge that?
- “Teaching is good but the support outside of the classroom is poor”
 - Do students realise they may be entitled to better support?



Quality

- Each university has the responsibility for maintaining the quality of the education it provides and the standards of the qualifications it offers.
- Universities are their own awarding bodies and they continually assess their systems and their courses to ensure that they are fit for purpose.
- They do this on an annual basis, for example, by considering reports by external experts and evaluating student performance and feedback; and through Periodic Reviews involving internal and external peers, students and recent graduates of the course.
- As well as regular scrutiny at the level of individual courses, universities also conduct their own, wider, subject-level reviews. In addition, all universities use a network of external experts – called external examiners - to advise on whether the standards a university sets are appropriate.



Quality

- Universities also engage collectively in a range of activities designed to secure and enhance the reputation of the sector as a whole.
- Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications, describe the standards represented by each qualification
- Subject Benchmark Statements, set out how those standards apply in particular subject areas
- UK Quality Code, which sets out precepts and guidance for universities about the management of academic quality and standards.
- Membership of the QAA, which arranged institutional (peer and student) review against the Quality Code



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>

**+No
institutional
review!**

Regulatory Framework

Condition B1: The provider must deliver well-designed courses that provide a high quality academic experience for all students and enable a student's achievement to be reliably assessed.

Condition B2: The provider must provide all students, from admission through to completion, with the support that they need to succeed in and benefit from higher education.

Condition B3: The provider must deliver successful outcomes for all of its students, which are recognised and valued by employers and/or enable further study.

Condition B4: The provider must ensure that qualifications awarded to students hold their value at the point of qualification and over time, in line with sector recognised standards.

Condition B5: The provider must deliver courses that meet the academic standards as they are described in the Framework for Higher Education Qualification (FHEQ) at Level 4 or higher.

Breakaway from QC

- Two consultations:
- One on B3/Outcomes (the "B3 Bear")
- One on B1, 2, 4, 5 – the rest of quality!
 - Condition B1 requires that all students receive a high quality academic experience. This means that courses must be up-to-date, challenging and well delivered, and equip students with the skills they will need after graduation.
 - Condition B2 requires that all students receive the resources and support they need to succeed on their courses and after graduation.
 - Condition B4 requires universities and colleges to assess students effectively and award qualifications that are credible and stand the test of time.
 - Condition B5 ensures that the standard of qualifications is consistent with sector-recognised standards.



OfS and "quality"

- December 2020: Consultation on information about providers
- Propose that investigations usually confidential
- Various events:
 - Susan Lapworth at IHE
 - Kathleen Stock and the Lords
 - Skills Bill
 - Letter from ministers
- Complete U-Turn!



OfS and regulation

- Ministerial letters to OfS
- First to "speed up" B3 and outcomes (plus SNCs related to outcomes)
- Now on B1, 2, 4 – onsite inspections...
 - that online learning should be used to complement and enhance a student's learning experience, not to detract from it;
 - the provision of sufficient contact hours, particularly where this has been flagged by intelligence from students; and
 - the importance of maintaining rigour in assessment, including appropriate technical proficiency in English necessary to secure a good outcome for all or some students.



Summary

- B1: The course itself – curriculum, teaching
- B2: Resources, support and student engagement
- B3: Outcomes (continuation, completion, progression)
- B4: Assessment and Awards

- Do SU officers know them?
- Do course reps use them when feeding back?
- Are surveys built around them?
- Could the student submission be built around them?



The B Conditions...

Condition B1: Academic experience

- The provider must ensure that the students registered on each higher education course receive a high quality academic experience.
- A high quality academic experience includes but is not limited to ensuring that each course:
- **is up-to-date; provides educational challenge; is coherent; is effectively delivered; and as appropriate to the subject matter of the course, requires students to develop relevant skills.**



Up to date and appropriately informed...

- The subject matter of a course is not representative of current thinking and practices.
- The pedagogy of a course is not representative of current thinking and practices.
- The length of the period during which aspects of the course have not been updated.
- The scale and nature of the changes needed to ensure the course is up-to-date.
- The impact on students and others of an out-of-date course.
- Whether a provider has plans to make changes to a course to ensure it is up-to-date.



Educational challenge

- An integrated masters' course with a final year of study that does not provide sufficient rigour and difficulty, for example because students at different stages of the course are taught together in a way that does not recognise the different challenge needed, would likely be of concern.
- An undergraduate degree course with an integrated foundation year, where the foundation year does not provide sufficient rigour and difficulty such that students are not prepared for successful study in the undergraduate course, would likely be of concern.
- A research degree course that is focused on a research question that provides limited scope for original ideas would likely be of concern.



Coherent

- The content of a course is too narrow.
- The content of a course is too broad.
- Students are not secure in foundational topics.
- Practical or practice-based components are not taught in an appropriate order
- Module choices do not ensure students are able to construct a coherent pathway.



Effective delivery

- The range of learning activities is too narrow.
- Learning activities are not delivered effectively. For example, insufficient opportunities for students to engage directly with teaching staff, including where parts of a course are delivered remotely, would likely be of concern.
- The research environment does not support students' learning.
- Professional or practice-based elements are not integrated with academic elements.
- Assessment is not designed into the course.



Relevant skills

- A course that does not require students to develop and demonstrate intellectual skills, such as evaluating evidence, mobilising an argument, and solving problems, consistent with the subject and level of the course, would likely be of concern.
- A course designed to lead to a particular profession that does not require students to develop and demonstrate the skills necessary for success in that profession, for example, where specific skills are required for a relevant PSRB accreditation, would likely be of concern.



B2: Resources, support and student engagement

The provider must take all reasonable steps to ensure that students receive resources and support, and that there is effective engagement with each cohort of students to ensure, that there is a high quality academic experience for those students, and that students succeed in and beyond higher education.



B2 fails

- A staff team comprised solely of inexperienced teachers is not likely to be appropriately qualified.
- A staff team with narrow collective expertise in a subject area is not likely to be appropriately qualified if the range of options available to students extend beyond that collective expertise.
- A staff team in which none of the individuals hold a teaching qualification or have been trained to undertake teaching is not likely to be appropriately qualified.
- A staff team that is over-reliant on visiting teachers to deliver large or significant elements of a course is not likely to be appropriately qualified.
- A staff team that does not conduct research at the forefront of relevant discipline(s) is not likely to be appropriately qualified to provide supervision to research students.



B2 Physical and digital

- Appropriate laboratory and technical resources for STEM subjects.
- Appropriate studio, performance, and technical resources for creative subjects
- Appropriate hardware
- Appropriate software. Students have, or have reliable and consistent access to, the software they need to effectively access all aspects of course content.
- Robust technical infrastructure.
- Reliable access to the internet.
- A trained teacher or instructor.
- An appropriate study place.



B2 Support

- Academic support includes support to help students with course content or on placements, to identify and address knowledge or skills gaps, and make decisions about future study choices.
- Support needed to underpin successful physical and digital learning and teaching includes support to help students make best use of digital learning.
- Support relating to avoiding academic misconduct includes support for essay planning and accurate referencing, and advice about the consequences of academic misconduct
- Careers support includes the information, advice and guidance students need to identify their capabilities and the way in which these may be suited to particular careers, and to articulate these in a way likely to result in successful job applications



B2 Engagement

- Membership of, and effective contribution to, the provider's committees.
- Student feedback. Students not given a range of opportunities, either individually or collectively, to provide feedback on their course and the way it is delivered would likely be of concern



The B Conditions...

Condition B4: Assessment and awards

The provider must ensure that:

- students are assessed effectively;
- each assessment is valid and reliable;
- academic regulations are designed to ensure that relevant awards are credible;
- academic regulations are designed to ensure the effective assessment of technical proficiency in the English language in a way which appropriately reflects the level and content of the course; and
- relevant awards granted to students are credible at the point of being granted and when compared to those granted previously.



B4 Effective assessment

- An undergraduate degree course in which students at different stages of the course are taught together on a module and assessed in the same way, but without differentiation in the marking criteria, would likely be of concern.
- A course that assesses a limited range of subject matter, or knowledge and skills would likely be of concern.
- An integrated higher or degree apprenticeship end-point assessment that does not meet the requirements of external quality assurance monitoring, for example because it is not delivered in line with the published EPA plan, would likely be of concern.
- A course that is accredited by a PSRB and does not meet the requirements for assessment set by that body would likely be of concern.
- An absence of feedback on students' performance before a final essay or exam, or feedback not returned in time for students to learn from it before the next assessment, would likely be of concern.



The B Conditions...

Condition B3: Student Outcomes

- The provider must deliver successful outcomes for all of its students, which are recognised and valued by employers and/or enable further study.



B3: Outcomes

- The percentage of students that get to their second year (if they have one)
- The percentage of students that complete the award they signed up for
- The percentage of students that get a graduate job



B5: Sector standards

- Subject benchmark standards
- Degree outcome statements
- Degree classification descriptions



Subject Benchmark Statement

Archaeology

March 2022

Summary

B1: The course itself – curriculum, teaching

B2: Resources, support and student engagement

B3: Outcomes (continuation, completion, progression)

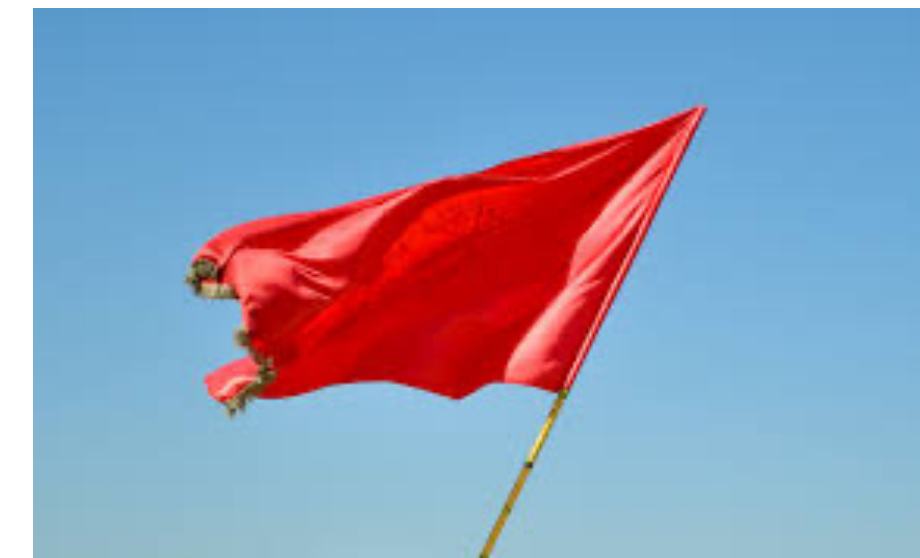
B4: Assessment and Awards

- Do SU officers know them?
- Do course reps use them when feeding back?
- Are surveys built around them?
- Could the student submission be built around them?
- Day to day work, (minor before major) complaints



Summary

- Rights based around the NSS questions
- Rights based around B1-5
- Rights in wider law with duties on Pas (equality, safety etc)
- Rights based on expectations set (consumer protection law)
- Rights based on policies set internally



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Questions?

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