



The UK Quality Code for Higher Education

Version for sector consultation

Version for sector consultation, April 2024

This document contains the proposed revisions for a redeveloped UK Quality Code to be published in June 2024. QAA is consulting through an [online survey](#), which will run between 8 April and 17 May 2024, building on engagement activities undertaken with the sector since October 2022.

Further information about the [background to the revision of the Quality Code](#) can be found on our website.

If you have any queries about the redevelopment of the Quality Code, please contact: membership@qaa.ac.uk

Contents

Introduction	1
The UK Quality Code for Higher Education	1
Structure	1
Regulatory information	2
How the Quality Code is used	2
Designing, developing, implementing and maintaining providers' quality and standards frameworks.....	2
Reviewing policy and practice	2
Enhancing the student learning experience	2
Assuring and promoting equality, diversity and inclusion	3
Sector-Agreed Principles	4
Strategic approach.....	4
Principle 1 - Taking a strategic approach to managing quality and standards	4
Principle 2 - Engaging students as partners	4
Principle 3 - Resourcing delivery of a high-quality learning experience.....	5
Evaluating quality and standards	6
Principle 4 - Using data to inform and evaluate quality	6
Principle 5 - Monitoring, evaluating and enhancing provision.....	6
Principle 6 - Engaging in external review and accreditation	7
Implementing the approach to quality enhancement and standards	8
Principle 7 - Designing, developing, approving and modifying programmes	8
Principle 8 - Operating partnerships with other organisations	8
Principle 9 - Recruiting, selecting and admitting students	9
Principle 10 - Supporting students to achieve their potential	9
Principle 11 - Teaching, learning and assessment.....	10
Principle 12 - Operating concerns, complaints and appeals processes	11
Glossary of key terms	12

Introduction

The UK Quality Code for Higher Education

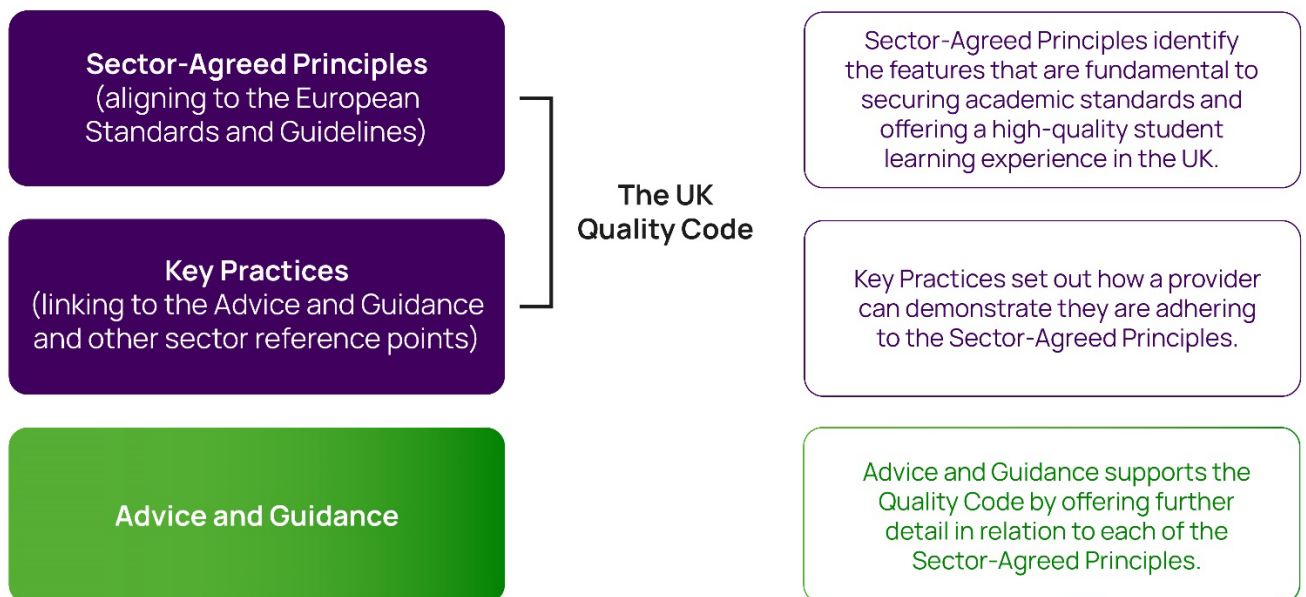
The UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) articulates the principles of UK higher education for securing academic standards and assuring and enhancing quality. This is the fourth version of the Quality Code since it was first developed in the late 1990s. The Quality Code was originally developed by and for the UK higher education sector. This edition is intended to have application beyond higher education in recognition that many parts of the UK are seeking to develop tertiary approaches to education.

The Quality Code is a sector-led reference point which can be used in a range of flexible ways. It enables providers to evaluate their policies and practices with reference to Sector-Agreed Principles and it aligns with key international reference points including the [European Standards and Guidelines](#) (ESG).

Built on a shared understanding across the UK, the Quality Code enables providers to see what is expected of them and what they can expect of each other, irrespective of the specific regulatory framework in which they operate. It informs the public, protects students' interests and champions the UK's world-leading reputation for high-quality education provision.

Structure

The Quality Code comprises two elements - Sector-Agreed Principles and Key Practices. It is supported by a suite of Advice and Guidance.



Regulatory information

The Quality Code is UK-wide and reflects the typical approaches to delivering higher level education across the UK, while respecting different regulatory requirements. It is a key reference point in the quality approaches for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

In England, providers need to comply with the [Office for Students' Regulatory Framework and Conditions of Registration](#). Engaging with the Quality Code is voluntary for providers based in England, except for those providers reviewed against the Quality Code using the Educational Oversight Review (EOR) method.

Recognising the different regulatory approaches across the UK and the ways in which the Quality Code is used across different educational frameworks, providers will need to satisfy themselves that their statutory and regulatory requirements are adhered to. The Quality Code does not list all of these obligations. Further information is available for providers from their national funders and regulators.

All providers across the UK can use the Quality Code to satisfy themselves, external stakeholders and international partners that their quality processes support enhancement above the baseline. Because the Quality Code aligns to the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG), it offers providers an internationally-recognised framework through which they can demonstrate their delivery of a high-quality student experience, enabling students to succeed in their studies and progress their personal and professional goals.

How the Quality Code is used

The UK Quality Code can be applied across the full range of levels, modes and locations of study and qualifications. The overarching Principles and Key Practices offer a framework on which to design, develop, implement and enhance the quality of provision regardless of regulatory approach, precise educational setting or level or mode of study.

More specifically the Quality Code can be used for:

Designing, developing, implementing and maintaining providers' quality and standards frameworks

The Quality Code can be used to design and shape providers' own quality and standards frameworks. These frameworks articulate providers' internal expectations for high-quality provision, which are tailored to their individual contexts. It can act as a basis for training and for benchmarking practice and management reporting on quality and standards. In addition, it can be used as a component part of programme/module approval and review, for working with partners both in the UK and overseas, and to inform continuous improvement.

Reviewing policy and practice

The Quality Code is a tool for effective evaluation and review of policy and practice. It also acts as a guide for external review, capturing Sector-Agreed Principles that providers and external reviewers can use to evaluate their practices.

Enhancing the student learning experience

Providers can use the Quality Code to systematically improve the quality of provision and the ways in which students' learning is supported. Enhancing the student experience involves providers taking deliberate steps which may be part of continuous improvement or more significant changes in policy and practice.

The different elements of the Quality Code can be used as a framework to measure the effectiveness of quality assurance and to identify areas for enhancement. For example, providers may choose to map their practice to the overarching Principles to establish a benchmark for their approach to quality and standards, then consider the Key Practices as a means to evaluate if they are meeting the Principles, before finally looking to the Advice and Guidance to enhance their practice and offer specialist practitioners more in-depth information.

Assuring and promoting equality, diversity and inclusion

By applying the Sector-Agreed Principles and Key Practices, providers can reflect on the extent to which their approach to quality and standards supports the creation of inclusive and equitable experiences for students and staff. The Principles state that providers will have a strategy for equality, diversity and inclusion that is embedded in their organisational culture. Providers are also expected to systematically monitor the arrangements they have in place to ensure they are operating effectively. This will support all students to fulfil their potential and ensure that no individual or group is disadvantaged by teaching practices or curricula. Engaging students as partners will support the wider aims of inclusivity and enable providers to develop equitable approaches to quality assurance and enhancement.

Sector-Agreed Principles

The Sector-Agreed Principles identify the fundamental nature of quality and standards in UK higher education. There are 12 Principles and each has a set of Key Practices which providers can follow to demonstrate how they are adhering to that Principle.

Strategic approach

Principle 1 - Taking a strategic approach to managing quality and standards

Providers demonstrate they have a strategic approach to securing academic standards and assuring and enhancing quality that is embedded across the organisation.

Key Practices

- a Academic standards and the quality of the student learning experience are the responsibility of each provider. Degree-awarding bodies have particular responsibilities for the qualifications offered in their name.
- b The strategic approach is employed wherever and however provision is delivered and is embedded in the culture and practices of providers.
- c The strategic approach aligns with providers' policies and practices on equity, equality, diversity and inclusion for students and staff.
- d The strategic approach is published and supported by a comprehensive and transparent governance framework that is communicated clearly and is accessible to staff, students and external stakeholders.
- e The strategic approach is monitored, evaluated and enhanced on a regular basis.
- f External expertise is a key element of the strategic approach to managing quality and standards.

Principle 2 - Engaging students as partners

Providers take deliberate steps to engage students as active partners, individually and collectively, in the design, development, assurance and enhancement of the student learning experience at all levels of study and across the governance framework.

Key Practices

- a Student engagement through partnership working is strategically-led, student-centred and integral to the culture of providers.
- b Student engagement and representation activities are clearly defined, communicated, resourced and supported. Transparent arrangements are in place for the collective student voice to be heard and responded to.
- c Providers demonstrate effective engagement with students, ensuring any representative groups or panels reflect the diversity of the student body. Students understand that their voice has been listened to and are aware of how their views have impacted the assurance and enhancement of the student experience.

- d Student engagement opportunities and processes are inclusive of students' characteristics and responsive to the diversity of each provider's student population. They involve student representative bodies, where applicable.
- e Providers and student representative bodies, where such bodies are in place, recognise and celebrate the contribution of students to the enhancement of teaching and learning and the wider student experience.
- f Students are enabled and encouraged to engage actively in the academic governance and enhancement of the wider student experience beyond the formal curriculum.

Principle 3 - Resourcing delivery of a high-quality learning experience

Providers plan, secure and maintain learning, technology, facilities and human resources to enable the delivery and enhancement of an accessible, innovative and high-quality learning experience for students that is in line with the provider's strategy and the composition of the student body.

Key Practices

- a Strategic and operational plans, along with resources, align with the student journey and are designed and implemented to support a positive student experience and enable student achievement.
- b Providers ensure they have dedicated and accessible human, digital and physical resources to support and enhance the delivery of their programmes and the well-being of students and staff.
- c Resources are reviewed and updated in alignment with strategic and programme developments, as well as staff and student recruitment. This also ensures relevance to the workplace and the wider academic discipline.
- d Resources are allocated to ensure that staff receive ongoing professional development to support and enhance the delivery of a high-quality and innovative student learning experience.
- e Processes and activities to support the management of academic standards and quality enhancement are appropriately resourced to meet strategic, operational and regulatory objectives and requirements.
- f The creation, development and maintenance of accessible learning environments (physical and virtual) offer all students the opportunity to be engaged in their learning experience and facilitates a sense of belonging.

Evaluating quality and standards

Principle 4 - Using data to inform and evaluate quality

Providers collect, analyse and utilise qualitative and quantitative data at provider, departmental, programme and module levels to inform decision-making with the aim of enhancing practices and processes relating to teaching, learning and the wider student experience.

Key Practices

- a A consistent, coherent and evidence-informed approach to the collection, storage and management of data is employed across the provider. The provider makes explicit the type and level of data utilised (such as departmental, programme, module level) and the policies and processes that underpin its use in the maintenance of academic standards and the assurance and enhancement of quality.
- b Staff and students are aware of the types of data gathered and how it is stored and used in the management of quality and standards.
- c When designing and implementing monitoring and evaluation arrangements, staff and students take account of ethical and data protection requirements relating to gathering and submitting data for national data sets, regulatory purposes, and internal monitoring and evaluation.
- d Staff who are required to collect, manipulate and analyse data for reporting and quality enhancement purposes receive training that enables them to undertake these activities effectively.
- e Providers in partnership arrangements (including the student representative body, where applicable) ensure data sharing agreements and reporting requirements are clearly stated, understood and reviewed periodically.
- f Data is collected and analysed in ways that enable providers to understand and respond to the needs of their student populations, promoting equality, diversity and inclusion.

Principle 5 - Monitoring, evaluating and enhancing provision

Providers regularly monitor and review their provision and the underpinning policies, processes and practices to secure academic standards and enhance quality. Deliberate steps are taken to engage and involve students, staff and external expertise in monitoring and evaluation activity. The outcomes and impact of these activities are considered at provider level and conveyed to the governing body to drive reflection and enhancement across the provider.

Key Practices

- a Providers agree strategic principles for monitoring and evaluation to ensure processes are applied systematically and operated consistently.
- b The methods for monitoring and evaluation activity are documented to clarify their aims, objectives, intended actions and targets. They are explicit about how they will be

conducted, the nature of evidence (data) to be considered and the form of reporting, along with key indicators of success.

- c Staff and students are engaged in monitoring and evaluation activities and receive appropriate training and support to undertake them.
- d The actions and outcomes from monitoring and evaluation activities are communicated in an accessible manner to staff, students, the governing body and external stakeholders.
- e Improvements and enhancements that have been implemented as a result of monitoring and evaluation are, in turn, monitored and evaluated to ensure their impact is positive and remains fit for purpose.
- f Monitoring and evaluation activity facilitates providers' insights and promotion of equality, diversity and inclusion.
- g Programmes are monitored and reviewed regularly by internal and external peers, employers and students, in line with the provider's strategic approach to quality and standards and that of the relevant professional bodies.

Principle 6 - Engaging in external review and accreditation

Providers engage with external reviews to enable external evaluation of the implementation of their strategic approach to securing standards and assuring and enhancing quality. Reviews and accreditation actively include staff, students and peers. They can be undertaken by representative organisations, agencies or professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) with recognised sector expertise according to the provision being reviewed.

Key Practices

- a External review, whether voluntary or required by national quality frameworks, is built into the provider's strategic approach and aligns to internal quality and standards review activity.
- b Providers recognise that external review and accreditation can act as a catalyst for ongoing improvement and strategic enhancement of the student learning experience. Also, that it promotes reflection and evaluation followed by implementation of the associated actions.
- c Providers acknowledge and support the expertise and resource required to participate in external review and accreditation.
- d Providers who engage in external review understand the UK national regulatory and legislative contexts in which they operate and the different approaches, forms and focus they may take. Providers may engage colleagues with international expertise, in addition to those familiar with UK requirements.
- e Providers understand the requirements and process for external reviews that may be required by regulators in partner delivery locations.

Implementing the approach to quality enhancement and standards

Principle 7 - Designing, developing, approving and modifying programmes

Providers design, develop, approve and modify programmes of study to ensure the quality of provision and the academic standards of awards are consistent with the relevant national qualifications framework. Providers ensure their provision and level of qualifications are comparable to those offered across the UK and, where applicable, The Framework of Qualifications for the European Higher Education Area.

Key Practices

- a All programmes meet academic standards that are consistent with national frameworks and comparable across the UK, and, where applicable, meet [The Framework of Qualifications for The European Higher Education Area](#).
- b A definitive set of documents are produced from the design, development, approval and modification processes, which are held securely and act as the primary source of information about each programme.
- c The award received, and how outcomes of study are recorded and certificated, is made clear to all stakeholders involved in the teaching, learning and evaluation of the programme.
- d Policies and processes that support the design, development, approval, modification and review of programmes are published on each provider's website and easily accessible to key stakeholders.
- e External engagement and evaluation form a component part of the design, development, approval and modification process.

Principle 8 - Operating partnerships with other organisations

Providers and their partners have proportionate arrangements with effective governance to secure the academic standards and enhance the quality of programmes that are delivered in partnership with others. Organisations involved in partnership arrangements agree and communicate the mutual and specific responsibilities in relation to delivering, monitoring, evaluating, assuring and enhancing the learning experience.

Key Practices

- a Where academic provision is delivered through partnership, all partners agree, understand, communicate and take responsibility for the maintenance of academic standards and enhancement of quality.
- b Providers are aware that working in partnership with other organisations will involve different levels of risk. Due diligence processes are completed in accordance with each provider's approach to minimising risk, maintaining academic standards and enhancing quality.
- c Written agreements between partners are signed prior to the start of a programme and cover the lifecycle of the partnership, including details about closing a partnership early.

- d Providers and their partners ensure compliance with the regulatory and legislative requirements of the countries in which they work and maintain an awareness of the cultural context in which they operate.
- e Providers maintain accurate, up-to-date records of partnership arrangements that are subject to a formal agreement.
- f Partnerships are subject to ongoing scrutiny that includes regular monitoring, evaluation and periodic review to assure quality and facilitate enhancement.

Principle 9 - Recruiting, selecting and admitting students

Providers operate recruitment, selection and admissions processes that are transparent, fair and inclusive. Providers maintain and publish accurate, relevant and accessible information about their provision, enabling students to make informed choices about their studies and future aspirations.

Key Practices

- a Policies and procedures for application, recruitment, selection and admission to programmes are reliable, fair, transparent and accessible, including processes for the recognition of prior learning.
- b Information provided to prospective students and their advisors for recruitment and widening access purposes supports them in making informed decisions.
- c Providers meet their regulatory obligations in relation to the information presented about themselves and their programmes of study.
- d Staff, student representatives and external partners engaged in the delivery of recruitment, selection, admissions and widening access processes are appropriately trained and resourced.
- e All teams involved in the application, selection and admissions processes ensure information about the applicant journey is consistent and clear. Specific elements of the selection process are clearly defined and any programme changes that can impact decision making are communicated swiftly and consistently to enable all parties to exercise informed choice.

Principle 10 - Supporting students to achieve their potential

Providers facilitate a framework of support for students that enables them to have a high-quality learning experience and achieve their potential as they progress in their studies. The support structure scaffolds the academic, personal and professional learning journey, enabling students to recognise and articulate their progress and achievements.

Key Practices

- a Accessible, relevant, accurate and timely information is offered to students and other key stakeholders throughout the learning journey about the provider, programme of study, wider opportunities for development and availability of support services.

- b Students are supported at key transition points throughout their journey, with their specific needs and requirements met, and their particular pathways into learning recognised.
- c Students, staff and those supporting student progression are aware of the ongoing academic, professional and pastoral services and activities available, and students are encouraged to access these opportunities and the support throughout their learning journey.
- d Staff are appropriately qualified, trained and supported to deliver high-quality learning and support for all students, including those with specific needs and requirements.
- e Activities offered outside the formal curriculum are recognised as beneficial for promoting students' sense of belonging, as well as providing opportunities for students to broaden their skills and achievements, complementing their formal studies.

Principle 11 - Teaching, learning and assessment

Providers facilitate a collaborative approach to shaping a learning experience that enables students to have a high-quality experience and progress through their studies. All students are supported to develop and demonstrate academic and professional skills and competencies. Assessment employs a variety of methods, embodying the values of academic integrity, producing outcomes that are comparable across the UK and recognised globally.

Key Practices

- a Learning and assessment align to ensure students can demonstrate their potential and reflect on and reinforce their prior learning, skills and knowledge.
- b Students are clear about the intended modular and programme learning outcomes and the purpose of assessment, and they are enabled to use feedback/feedforward to support further learning.
- c Staff involved in facilitating learning and supervising research are appropriately qualified, supported and trained to deliver a high-quality learning experience, as well as being actively enabled to enhance their teaching and supervisory practice.
- d Students are enabled and encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning and to take an active role in shaping and enhancing the learning process. Providers offer ongoing advice and guidance about academic integrity to ensure that students and staff understand what is expected of them.
- e As students move through their learning journey they are given the opportunity and support to transition effectively between academic levels, recognising the progression they have made and steps they need to take to achieve their potential.
- f Providers design assessments that are appropriate, fair, reliable, accessible and inclusive. Where possible, and sustainable, students are offered different options for undertaking assessments to promote accessibility and inclusion.
- g Providers work in partnership with staff and students to establish coherent approaches to technology in teaching, learning and assessment (such as Generative Artificial Intelligence).
- h Research degrees are delivered in supportive environments that are conducive to learning and research with effective supervision arrangements. Learning and teaching at all levels is informed by research and/or scholarship.

Principle 12 - Operating concerns, complaints and appeals processes

Providers operate processes for complaints and appeals that are robust, fair, transparent and accessible, and clearly articulated to staff and students. Policies and processes for concerns, complaints and appeals are regularly reviewed and the outcomes are used to support the enhancement of provision and the student experience.

Key Practices

- a Policies and processes for concerns, complaints and appeals are accessible, robust and inclusive, and enable early resolution wherever possible and include information relating to recruitment, selection and admission.
- b Concerns, complaints and appeals policies and procedures, including information about them, are clear and transparent to students, those advising them and those implementing the processes. Formal and informal stages of the processes are clearly articulated.
- c Providers meet the national and (where applicable) international requirements of external bodies with responsibility for hearing or overseeing concerns and complaints.
- d Actions resulting from concerns, complaints and appeals are proportionate and enable cases to be resolved as early as possible.
- e Processes for concerns, complaints and appeals are monitored and reviewed to ensure they promote enhancement throughout the provider and operate as intended, to the benefit of students and staff.
- f Outcomes from concerns, complaints and appeals are used to develop and enhance teaching and learning and the wider student experience.

Glossary of key terms

The terms below are defined in the context of using the Quality Code. Further information regarding the definitions will be made available in the Advice and Guidance that supports the Quality Code.

Please note these terms may be defined differently in other contexts (within and beyond higher education) and by different stakeholders (such as regulators, students and individual providers).

Academic experience - the students' experience of studying on their programme, and their experience of any other resources, support, facilities and opportunities that the provider makes available to support their learning.

Academic Integrity - a commitment to the fundamental values of honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility. The opposite of academic integrity is unethical practices such as plagiarism, collusion, contract cheating or academic misconduct.

Enhancement - the deliberate and systematic improvement in the quality of provision and the ways in which students' learning is supported, involving the active engagement of students and staff. Enhancement has different interpretations across the UK with some UK nations having an 'enhancement-led' regulatory framework.

Equality - each individual or group of people is given the same resources or opportunities, but QAA considers that equality should include the concept of 'equity,' which recognises that each person has different needs and therefore resources and opportunities should be allocated to reach an equal outcome.

High quality - quality assurance and enhancement practices and processes that are robust and implemented consistently with a view to assuring and enhancing the student experience. It leads to credible and recognised outcomes for students.

Module - a self-contained, formally structured unit of study with a coherent and explicit set of learning outcomes and assessment criteria. Some institutions use the word 'course' to refer to individual modules. Can be referred to as 'units of study' in further education providers.

Partnership - all formal arrangements (in the UK or overseas) where a provider works with others to design and/or deliver courses and/or to award qualifications. The processes providers will need to follow to assure high quality will vary considerably depending on the type of partnership and the risks involved. Types of partnership include:

- validation/approval
- subcontracting/franchising
- work-based learning
- collaboration with employers (including to deliver apprenticeships)
- transnational education (TNE)
- international partnerships and collaborations
- hybrid approaches combining more than one of the above.

Quality - refers to how well providers support students to consistently achieve positive outcomes in learning, personal development and career advancement, while meeting the reasonable expectations of those students, employers, government and society in general.

Standards/academic standards - these are the standards that degree-awarding bodies set and maintain for the award of academic credit or qualifications. Degree-awarding bodies are

responsible for defining their own academic standards by setting the pass marks and determining the grading/marking schemes and any criteria for classification of qualifications that differentiate between levels of student achievement above and below the threshold academic standards. These individual standards align to national qualifications and credit frameworks and/or [The Framework of Qualifications for the European Higher Education Area](#).

Students - all learners/students irrespective of background or any protected characteristics, studying at any level and by any mode (including, but not limited to, undergraduate and postgraduate; full-time and part-time; distance, work-based and on-campus learners; higher education apprentices).

Students as partners - working with students as a 'partner' or in 'partnership' is used to define and indicate joint working between students (or the student representative body, students' union, association, or guild if they have one) and staff at the provider. The level of each partner's engagement will vary depending on the context and nature of the student experience. Student partnerships reflect a mature relationship based on mutual respect between students and staff.

Student voice - the individual or collective perspective opinion, feedback or contribution of students. It can relate to any aspect of the academic or wider student experience and should be sought across a provider covering the breadth of provision and included in decision-making committees. The use of student voice is integral to the quality enhancement of provision.

Tertiary education - all post-secondary education encompassing further and higher education including academic, vocational and professional qualifications. How the term is interpreted varies between the UK nations - providers are advised to check their funder/regulator's websites or the relevant external review guidance for further information. When working with overseas partners, providers should also check the definition as understood by their partner as the meaning of 'tertiary' may vary in different countries.

Wider student experience/co-curricular experience - the student experience beyond that of formal academic learning, for example experience gained through representation, participation in sports and societies, careers or volunteering.

Published - 8 April 2024

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2024
Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

+44 (0)1452 557 000
www.qaa.ac.uk