



UKSCQA

UK Standing Committee
for Quality Assessment

Quality and standards in UK higher education: regulation and oversight

May 2023

Joint statement by the UK funding and regulatory bodies

The bodies that oversee higher education in the four nations of the UK have jointly produced this statement for the benefit of organisations which engage with UK higher education around the world. We hope it will be of particular use to quality assurance agencies and regulators in countries where UK higher education institutions offer transnational education (TNE) provision.

High quality teaching and learning are a crucial part of students' academic experience. This joint statement sets out how quality and standards are regulated in UK higher education, including for courses delivered outside the UK.

The UK higher education sector

UK higher education is world leading, with excellence and expertise across all types of institutions and subjects. Regulation and oversight ensures that the standards of qualifications are secure, and that students receive a high quality academic experience. The sector's reputation is supported by cutting-edge research and its strength in vocational and professional education.

UK higher education consists of over 450 institutions across the four nations: England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. While each nation controls its own policies and systems for quality and regulation, and has its own funding/regulatory oversight body, there are underpinning principles which give rise to a common approach.

Each funding/regulatory body places specific quality and standards requirements on the institutions it oversees, to protect the quality of provision and the interests of students. Higher education institutions are required to have arrangements in place that ensure they are properly and effectively governed and managed,

as well as requirements to demonstrate good financial management and maintain long-term financial health.

High quality academic experience

Each nation has a framework that sets out expectations for quality and standards for all UK higher education courses, including those delivered overseas (transnational education (TNE)). Each framework includes requirements relating to the delivery of a high quality academic experience, assessment, progression, student engagement, student outcomes, complaints, degree standards and outcomes.

There is collective sector-led oversight of quality at UK level via the [UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment](#). The committee draws on academic, student and regulatory expertise from across the sector, and supports a collaborative approach to quality and standards, to promote the student interest and the international reputation of UK higher education. Standards for providing clear and accurate information, to enable students to make informed decisions, are set out by the [Competition and Markets Authority](#).

World leading learning and teaching

UK higher education is world leading and is underpinned by robust arrangements for the oversight of quality and standards. These ensure that high quality learning and teaching are maintained and its qualifications are internationally recognised. Provision in all nations of the UK aligns with standards regarding:

- internal quality assurance processes
- assurance of the competence of teachers
- design and approval of programmes
- student-centred learning, teaching and assessment

- student admission, progression, recognition and certification
- learning resources and student support
- information management
- public information
- ongoing monitoring
- periodic review of programmes.

Maintaining high quality academic standards

Each UK nation has arrangements in place to ensure that learning and teaching is of high quality and that courses meet UK academic standards. These arrangements provide assurance about the achievement required for an award or a classification, including the volume and level of qualification completed.

These threshold standards are consistent with the European Qualifications Framework.

All institutions are required to give students access to transparent and fair complaints processes, and students can also appeal to external adjudicators if they wish. All nations have mechanisms to ensure that quality is improved and enhanced.

There are requirements in place to ensure that the degree awards of UK institutions are fair and rigorous. Institutions are accountable to national funding/regulatory bodies for meeting these requirements and, as appropriate, use external and independent advice to ensure they are meeting the quality and standards requirements of each UK nation.

Institutions must ensure that courses are up to date in their subject area and enable students to develop the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment. They must also be informed by research – whether through students learning about cutting-edge research findings, developing research skills, using a research-based approach to learning, and/or taking part in research projects. Many courses have optional or compulsory work placements. Experts are involved in teaching throughout

the entire length of courses. Institutions often choose to go above and beyond these minimum requirements, further enhancing the reputation of UK higher education.

Supporting student success

All nations of the UK ensure that institutions appropriately support student success, enabling students to achieve their potential throughout their course. This includes study support, which helps students adjust to academic study. Most institutions have students' associations or unions which provide advice and services to students as well as representing them.

The requirements of each nation ensure that UK higher education courses enable students to develop skills relevant to employment alongside their subject-specific knowledge. These include skills such as critical thinking, analysis, and communication, and are highly valued by employers. Students receive careers support to help them succeed beyond their degree.

Encouraging student engagement

The strategic and effective involvement of students and students' perspectives is a key element in ensuring a high quality student academic experience. Student engagement is meaningful, ongoing and inclusive. Students are engaged both individually and collectively about the quality of their educational experience and their voices play an important role in enhancing its quality. Institutions hear the student voice through a wide range of mechanisms, including the [National Student Survey](#), [Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey](#) and [Postgraduate Research Experience Survey](#). Institutions and their students' associations/unions work to ensure they hear views from all student groups, including international students.

International recognition

UK institutions have links with partner institutions around the world, focusing on research, teaching, or both, and greatly value these connections. Many institutions and courses offer opportunities for students to study outside the UK, and the sector also welcomes

students from many different countries. Some of these students study in the UK, while others study UK courses online or overseas (for example, in branch campuses or with partner organisations).

Students studying with a UK institution outside the UK benefit from the same requirements for course quality and standards as those studying within the UK. This means that all students can be sure they will receive the same high quality experience, regardless of location.

Further information

For further information about the regulatory system of each of the four UK nations, use the links below:

England – see [Office for Students](#)

Northern Ireland – see [Department for the Economy](#)

Scotland – see [Scottish Funding Council](#)

Wales – see [Higher Education Funding Council for Wales](#).

UK useful links

Quality Assurance Agency conducts quality assurance – [The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education \(qaa.ac.uk\)](#)

[Universities UK International](#) supports international activities of UK universities.

[British Council](#) connects the UK with other countries.

[UK National Information Centre \(ENIC\)](#)
– for recognition and evaluation of international qualifications and skills.

