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The Quality Assurance Agency
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Useful addresses

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Quality Assurance

in UK

Higher Education

A brief guide

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The UK's quality assurance system

Higher education in the UK is subject to five main forms of quality assurance:

Institutions' own internal quality assurance processes

External quality assurance processes

Academic quality audit (previously undertaken by the Higher Education Quality Council. The new Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education took over this function from 1 August 1997)

Quality assessment (previously undertaken separately by the three higher education funding councils for England, Scotland and Wales. The QAA took over the delivery of the assessment process from 1 October 1997, except in Scotland (but the funding councils retain the legal responsibility for ensuring that quality is assessed)

Professional accreditation of vocational and professional subjects (undertaken by a range of professional and statutory bodies)

The research assessment exercise (undertaken jointly by the three higher education funding councils)

Introduction

This booklet has been written to help readers understand the ways in which academic quality and standards are assured in the United Kingdom. British universities and colleges take quality and standards very seriously. British higher education has quality assurance arrangements of unrivalled coverage, sophistication and rigour. This is not a reflection of worries about quality and standards but an indication of the importance which British institutions, and those who fund and supervise them, attach to protecting quality and standards, and of being seen to do so. It is also part of a national drive to secure educational standards at all levels.

Higher education in the United Kingdom has undergone enormous growth and changes in recent years. Britain now has an extensive, diverse, dynamic and innovative higher education system. Whilst these changes have certainly posed challenges for quality assurance, there is no evidence that they have led to any significant deterioration in the quality of programmes and courses offered either in the UK or abroad. Britain remains a high quality provider of higher education in all its many modern forms.

The phrase 'quality assurance' is used in different ways in different countries and contexts. In the sections that follow, 'quality assurance' is defined as:

the totality of systems, resources and information devoted to maintaining and improving the quality and standards of teaching, scholarship and research, and of students' learning experience.

There is nothing secret about quality assurance in British higher education. All the external processes which are described in this booklet, as well as many of the internal ones, lead to published reports or ratings. In addition, the Government and those higher education sector bodies that are responsible for quality and standards publish an enormous amount of information each year about all aspects of quality in UK higher education. We hope that this brief introduction to our quality assurance arrangements will help readers to understand the basic processes currently in use.

The award of degrees

It is illegal in the UK to offer degrees or related qualifications (such as *Bachelor, Master or Doctor*) without proper authorisation. Authorisation may be granted under Royal Charter or Act of Parliament, or by a special order of the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), the Government department responsible for education. Institutions seeking permission to award degrees are required to demonstrate that they have a commitment to quality assurance and adequate systems for safeguarding academic standards. Institutions wishing to use the title *University* must be authorised to award both taught and research degrees, and are required to meet additional conditions relating to size, breadth of studies, and experience in degree-level education. The Government is advised on these matters by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). This responsibility was previously discharged by the former Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC).

Institutions' own internal quality assurance processes

Universities and colleges in the United Kingdom are self-governing institutions with full and clear legal responsibility for the quality and standards of their programmes and awards. In many instances their own internal quality assurance arrangements go back many years. Institutions are also subject to increasingly fierce competition for students and resources. They compete mainly on the basis of quality and reputation. The markets in which they compete are themselves becoming increasingly competitive and well informed.

Ultimately the quality of higher education depends on two things: the interaction or dialogue between the teacher and the student; and the collective integrity and professionalism of the academic community. It is appropriate therefore to begin a description of institutions' internal quality assurance processes with the responsibilities of individual academic staff.

In the UK individual members of faculty are accountable to:

- their students;
- their subjects or disciplines;
- their vocations (teaching, research, administration);
- their colleagues;
- their professional bodies;
- their institutions.

These professional accountabilities are accompanied and reinforced by a number of formal institutional mechanisms. These usually include:

- admissions policies to ensure that only students capable of benefiting from particular programmes are enrolled;
- course approval and review so that only programmes which are fit to lead to an institution's award are offered;
- assessment regulations and mechanisms so that only students who reach the required level of attainment receive awards;
- monitoring and feedback processes so that opportunities are taken to improve the quality of what is offered;
- staff selection and development so that only suitably qualified and trained staff teach students or conduct research or administration;
- staff appraisal so that staff receive regular structured feedback on their performance.

Ultimate responsibility for the quality and standards of the teaching and learning offered by an institution rests with its council or governing body. Oversight of the institution's academic affairs is usually the responsibility of a senate or academic board. This in turn usually has a committee responsible for academic standards and related matters, including responsibility for the effectiveness of the mechanisms listed above. Such a committee is often supported by institution-wide sub-committees and/or by analogous committees at department, faculty, school or research centre level. In most institutions responsibility for implementing the decisions and

outcomes of these committees belongs to a senior staff member at pro vice-chancellor level, very often supported by a quality assurance director and administration.

Many institutions also have internal review mechanisms looking at the effectiveness of individual units or services. These often cover research and departmental management as well as teaching. A number of institutions have internal quality audits covering not only individual academic units but also services like estate management and libraries. The information arising from all these processes enables institutions to improve their provision, and many institutions have dedicated enhancement or development units for this purpose.

Outside assessors

Most of these control and review mechanisms involve a significant element external to the department or institution concerned. This is another distinctive feature of UK quality assurance. Institutions frequently involve outside assessors in course approval and review procedures, and in advising on course design and delivery. Institutions employ external examiners to try to see that the standards of their awards are comparable to those in the same or similar courses at other institutions, and also that their students are being assessed fairly. Where the institution is involved in delivering programmes which lead to an award from another institution or body, these external accountabilities are heavier, a process known as 'validation' or 'accreditation'. In these cases, programmes are subject to control both by the institution delivering the programme and by the institution offering the award. The latter will very often be another academic institution but it may be an organisation outside higher education, for example a body such as the Business Technology and Education Council (BTEQ/Edexcel, which awards national certificates, diplomas or other qualifications.

Finally, institutions are also making increasing use of various forms of statistical indicators or other performance measures. The former typically include things like staff/student ratios, average units of funding, course completion rates, entry and/or exit qualifications,

and first employment destinations. The latter typically take the form of profiling, where the institution benchmarks against other comparable provision, or against some national norm, on one or more separate variables.

All of these processes lead to the generation, and in many cases the publication, of a good deal of information about institutions' academic and non-academic services and the ways in which these are being improved. In addition, the *Charter for Higher Education*, an advisory document produced by the DfEE, specifies a number of matters about which institutions are expected to publish information, for example course structures, aims, qualifications received, and opportunities to proceed to further study. A number of institutions have gone beyond this in local charters and/or in prospectuses or other material, seeing such information as a marketing tool in its own right, as well as a matter of public interest.

External quality assurance

In addition to their own internal quality systems, institutions are also subject to a number of major external quality assurance mechanisms. Why are these needed?

There is a widespread recognition that large sums of public money cannot be allocated to higher education, or any other public service, without some reasonable evidence that the money will be well spent, and in particular that it will help to produce the highly educated and trained workforce that a modern industrial democracy requires. Universities and colleges have an obligation to protect the standing and good name of higher education. When the higher education system was small and largely uniform, and made a relatively small claim on public funds, reliance upon implicit, shared assumptions and informal networks and procedures may have been possible, and sufficient. But with the rapid expansion of the numbers of students and institutions, the associated broadening of the purposes of higher education, and the considerable increase in the amount of

public money required, more methodical approaches have had to be employed to provide the same guarantees. Institutions' own internal mechanisms are important elements in providing these guarantees, but external scrutiny is also needed to confirm that institutions' responsibilities are being properly discharged. The process of external scrutiny also makes an important contribution to the improvement of quality.

Academic quality audit

Academic quality audit is undertaken by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, a body formally owned by all the higher education institutions in the UK, but which has a more widely representative membership on its Board of Directors, including a substantial group of independent members. Previously, academic quality audit was undertaken by the Higher Education Quality Council. The process which was used between 1991 and 1997 examined the way in which each university or college managed the quality of its educational provision, not only teaching and learning, but also research degree students and programmes and the links between teaching, research and scholarly activity. Audit therefore covered such topics as:

- the design and review of courses and programmes;
- teaching, learning and the student experience;
- the recruitment, training, development and appraisal of staff;
- student assessment and examining including degree classification;
- academic standards;
- feedback and verification systems;
- institutional promotional material.

All UK universities and colleges have been audited since 1991. A fresh round of audits began in 1997. This new round, known as 'continuation audit', has changed its focus and is now looking both at the more general question of how individual institutions

discharge their obligations and responsibilities for the academic standards and quality of their programmes and awards, and at the evidence they themselves are relying on for this purpose. The new audit reports express a view on the degree of confidence of the audit team that the institution is properly safeguarding its quality and standards. This audit procedure is an interim stage towards the development and implementation of the proposals for quality assurance contained in the 1997 Dearing Report (see below).

The QAA audits are carried out by experienced senior academic staff from outside the institution. There are also audits of institutions' collaborative provision: programmes delivered in partnership with institutions in other sectors of education or overseas. The audit reports are published and contain an overall view, including the strengths and weaknesses, of the effectiveness of the management of quality at the institution, together with recommendations for improvement. Audit does not evaluate individual departments or academic programmes. One year after the publication of the audit report, institutions are asked to report on the action they have taken in response to the areas identified as being in need of improvement.

Quality assessment

Whereas audit looks at the way institutions manage their responsibilities for the quality of programmes and awards offered in their names, quality assessment (sometimes known as 'teaching quality assessment' or 'TQA') looks at the quality of teaching and learning in specific subjects or disciplines within institutions. It is therefore concerned with students' learning experience and student achievement at the subject level. Quality assessment covers:

- curriculum design, content and organisation;
- teaching, learning and assessment;
- student progression and achievement;
- student support and guidance;
- learning resources;
- quality management and enhancement (at department level).

The assessments are carried out by academic staff experienced in the subject and external to the institution concerned. Assessment visits include scrutiny of external examiners' reports and students' work, observation of a range of teaching and learning sessions, and discussions with students, teachers and managers. Each assessment visit leads to a published report on the quality of the provision in the subject. Unlike the audit reports, quality assessment grades the extent of the institution's achievement in each of the six aspects of provision set out above. Well over half of all the programmes being offered in UK universities and colleges have now been assessed in this way, and almost all of this provision has been found to be of a satisfactory quality or better.

Until September 1997 quality assessments were undertaken by the three higher education funding councils, for England, Scotland and Wales. Teaching quality assessments of subjects and programmes in Northern Ireland were undertaken by HEFCE for the Department of Education Northern Ireland. Each council's approach to quality assessment is slightly different, as are their grading systems. The councils are legally required to ensure that the quality of education funded by them is assessed. From 1 October 1997, quality assessments in England and Wales became the responsibility of the QAA under contractual agreements with the relevant funding councils. In Scotland they continue to be undertaken by the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council. The cycle of assessments in Wales and Scotland will be completed in 1998 and in England is scheduled to be completed in 2001. In the meantime, from 1998-99 the QAA is trialling a new subject-based evaluation process, based on proposals in the Dearing Report for securing academic standards and quality, and strengthening the external examiner function.

Accreditation

Where it leads to a professional or vocational qualification, institutional provision for teaching and learning is also subject to a separate process, known generally as accreditation, which is carried out by or on behalf of the relevant professional or statutory body. Examples include engineering, law, accountancy, and personnel management. Medicine, dentistry and teaching are subject to even closer control.

The purpose of accreditation is to ensure fitness for professional practice. The methods used vary but most typically focus on the relevant course or programme together with the relevant providing unit. Accreditation therefore covers matters like the qualifications of students and staff, the curriculum and delivery methods, learning resources, and student assessment (with many professional bodies having their own external examiners). A number of awarding bodies other than universities and colleges - such as BTEC/Edexcel - apply similar external quality processes to courses delivered in institutions that lead to their qualifications. In some cases, since 1996, the processes of accreditation and assessment of the quality of education have been brought closer together to reduce the burden on institutions.

Research assessment

The system-wide evaluation of research, covering all forms of original investigation to gain knowledge and understanding, has been the subject of 'research assessment exercises' (RAE) carried out every few years since 1986 by the higher education funding councils. The most recent RAE was in 1996. The assessments are made by panels of subject experts: researchers of high standing in their disciplines. The panels rate each department's research on a seven point scale. The ratings are published and inform funding allocations made by the funding councils. Alongside the research assessment exercise, which covers research funded by the higher education funding agencies, other funders of research - notably the research councils, public sector organisations, companies and charities - have their own arrangements to assess the value and quality of the research they are supporting.

For further information concerning the assessment of research please contact: David Pilsbury, Head of Research, Higher Education Funding Council for England, Northavon House, Coldharbour Lane, Bristol, BS16 1QD.

Quality enhancement

The reports and ratings which result from all these processes contain a good deal of information which not only reassures the funders and informs students and employers, but also helps institutions themselves to improve practice. In addition, however, the agencies which manage these various processes also carry out significant enhancement activities: enhancement here being defined as the provision of information to help institutions evaluate, improve, change or transform the quality of their teaching and learning. Work is undertaken under a number of headings including:

- the production of guidelines on good practice to support institutional quality assurance. Such guidelines provide a framework within which quality audit and quality assessment are undertaken, and the findings of the audit and assessment processes in turn feed into subsequent editions;
- the analysis and dissemination of the collected findings about quality and standards contained in audit and assessment reports. This gives a regular and systematic picture of how academic subjects are delivered, the achievements of students, and how UK institutions are developing and refining their quality assurance arrangements;
- undertaking development projects on topics of importance to many institutions, as indicated through the findings of audit and assessment, for example, on support for students' learning, on quality assurance links between further and higher education, on developments in modular provision and credit-based learning, and on quality management within academic departments;
- investigating matters of national interest for the future improvement of quality and standards including the standards of first degrees and ways of strengthening the external examiner system;
- the establishment and support of practitioner networks to facilitate exchanges of good practice across institutions;
- publications which alert institutions to developments in quality and standards locally, nationally and internationally.

Overseas collaborative activity

There has in recent years been an enormous expansion in the international activities of UK universities and colleges, especially in programmes delivered collaboratively with overseas institutions. Such partnerships:

- give students overseas an opportunity to experience UK higher education and/or the opportunity to obtain a British higher education award;
- give UK institutions the opportunity to diversify their educational offerings;
- give academic staff opportunities for curriculum, pedagogical or personal development;
- enable UK institutions to diversify their range of income sources.

The last of these has attracted comment in certain sections of the press and media. Partly as a result of this media interest, and partly because British higher education should be seen to be of high quality however and wherever it is delivered, HEQC published at the end of 1995 a code of practice for institutions engaged in overseas partnerships. The code covers: the purposes of such links; responsibility for quality and standards; the selection of partner institutions; financial arrangements; formal agreements; determination of links; the selection and use of agents; quality control; duration of studies; staff qualifications; language of instruction; certification; academic standards; conduct of student assessments; information and publicity.

The code supplements other codes, notably:

- the CVCP code on the recruitment and support of international students in UK higher education;
- the British Council's Education Counselling Service code of practice; and the Code of Practice of the Council of Validating Universities.

The HEQC code (now endorsed by QAA) is monitored in two ways.

First, QAA will investigate any complaint which it receives from a reputable source which suggests, *prima facie*, that an institution, or someone acting on its behalf, may not be acting in accordance with the code.

Second, QAA (and HEQC formerly) conducts a programme of audits of institutions' overseas partnerships. The purpose is to provide reassurance that, so far as practicable, the quality of the educational experience which a student receives on one of these programmes is fully comparable with that which he or she would receive were they studying on the same course in the UK.

Future arrangements

Following consultation on the quality assurance systems in the last two years, the functions of quality assessment, quality audit and the assurance of standards are in the process of being combined under the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. The Agency has taken over the work of the Higher Education Quality Council and the conduct of quality assessments on behalf of the Higher Education Funding Councils for England and Wales. Arrangements in Scotland are still under discussion but it is probable that the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council will also co-operate in establishing a single UK-wide quality assurance process, and has agreed to terminate its own quality assessment programme on completion of the first cycle in 1998. Meanwhile, a revision of both the quality audit and quality assessment procedures is under way. The conduct of research assessment will remain in the hands of the Funding Councils.

A National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, under the Chairmanship of Sir Ron Dearing, reported in July 1997. The report included important recommendations on quality assurance and standards, and proposed that higher education institutions and the QAA should work together to produce a national framework for

higher education qualifications in which all higher education awards would have a consistent terminology. In each subject area, the academic community would develop benchmark standards for the achievements expected at various levels of award. The external examiner system would be strengthened by creating a UK-wide pool of external examiners recognised by the QAA. The QAA should develop a fair and robust system for responding to complaints and other evidence of serious academic failings in an institution.

The National Committee recommended that underpinning the external quality assurance process would be a series of codes of practice covering all quality assurance matters, which institutions would be required to abide by. Adherence to the codes would be checked by a five-yearly institutional review. The Committee believed that, if these proposals were successfully implemented, their effect would be to reduce the intensity of routine external scrutiny of quality and standards currently imposed through audit and assessment.

Since the report was published, the QAA has been undertaking preliminary work on developing the bearing proposals within the timescale proposed by the Committee.

Guidelines on the Quality Assurance of Distance Learning

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Introduction

The purpose of the guidelines

These guidelines offer advice on assuring the quality and academic standards of higher education programmes of study provided through distance learning. The practice of 'distance learning' has been developing and evolving in many different forms in recent years, so that the phrase is now routinely applied to a very wide spectrum of activities. Distance learning is increasingly being looked to by many institutions as an economical way of expanding their activities, widening opportunities for students around the world, and making effective use of the new technologies which are rapidly emerging. The guidelines have been produced at the request of the distance learning community in the United Kingdom, which has recognised not only that the continued development of this form of higher education and its worldwide acceptance depend upon rigorous quality assurance, but also that there are many areas in which the usual ways of doing things for 'on-campus' provision are not necessarily appropriate in the context of distance learning.

For the purpose of these guidelines, 'distance learning' has been taken to mean a way of providing higher education that involves the transfer to the student's location of the materials that form the main basis of study, rather than the student moving to the location of the resource provider. There is considerable debate, nationally and internationally, about appropriate terminology, and a number of different terms are commonly used which refer to the same or similar sort of activity. There is also great diversity in the large number of actual arrangements - and even more in potential arrangements - to which these guidelines are directed. As the nature of institution-centred and of collaborative provision develops and changes, and as the potential for distance learning is explored further, the boundaries between different forms of higher education are becoming less easy to recognise. These guidelines do not assume that distance learning is a separate and unique form of higher education around which there are clear, let alone fixed, boundaries. Nor is it assumed that all distance learning has uniform characteristics. Nevertheless, a large and diverse body of current provision, although often described using different terms, is readily identifiable.

Programmes of distance learning have some basic features in common which broadly distinguish them from institution-centred modes of learning: physical proximity is not a requirement of study and programmes made available through distance learning all involve some degree of physical separation of the student (the learner) from the institution responsible for providing the teaching and making the award. There are also a number of ways in which teaching and learning activities to support students on distance learning programmes of study involve distinctive divisions of labour and allocations of responsibilities.

System design, programme design and delivery, student development and support, student communication and representation, and student assessment all raise particular questions for institutions about the ways in which they 'manage' teaching and learning to ensure that the quality of provision and security of academic standards are as they need to be. The purpose of the present guidelines is to help institutions to check the soundness of their arrangements for these aspects when the programmes of study are offered through distance learning.

The guidelines have been developed with the assistance of a working group initially convened in 1997 by the former Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC), and continued by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). They build on the generic *Guidelines on quality assurance* produced by the HEQC in 1996 and on institutional quality audit reports, undertaken in the first instance by the HEQC and latterly by QAA. In the preparation of the guidelines the working group has also drawn on advice from colleagues with an active involvement in, and experience of, a variety of forms of distance learning, and has taken into account existing guidelines and codes, both generic and specific to individual institutions. Appendix 3 provides details of the groups involved. A list of generic publications offering additional advice on quality assurance with particular reference to distance learning, and which the working group has found helpful, is given in Appendix 4.

The form and status of the guidelines

As part of its development of a comprehensive quality assurance process for higher education, QAA is producing a Code of Practice for Quality Assurance in Higher Education in the form of a series of self-contained sections covering the management of quality and standards in all teaching and learning activities. As part of this work, these present guidelines (which do not in their current form have the status of a section of the Code of Practice) will in due course be reviewed and become the starting point for a code of practice for distance learning which will be incorporated into the wider QAA Code. To this end they have been designed to resemble the QAA codes in format, extended by the inclusion of additional 'exemplifying questions'. Users of this publication are invited to offer their comments and opinions on the usefulness or otherwise of the guidelines, and on their coverage. There will be further consultation with the higher education sector in the course of preparing the formal Code of Practice.

The scope of the guidelines

These guidelines are concerned with arrangements made by UK universities and colleges to provide programmes of study by means of distance learning, whether in the UK or overseas. The guidelines focus on those aspects where the 'distance element' presents a special challenge to the assurance of quality of provision and the security of academic standards of programmes of study and awards. In these

particular areas the guidelines build on principles which apply generally to higher education and relate those principles to distance learning provision. In other areas, guidance relating generally to higher education is equally applicable to provision through distance learning. Precepts and guidance for higher education on aspects, for example, of admissions requirements and external examining, apply equally to distance learning provision.

Distance learning must rely on a sound and effective logistical and administrative infrastructure to ensure that all participants' activities are co-ordinated and engage with the programme as designed by the provider. There is likely to be a distinct division of labour both in teaching and administration. An integral part of the teaching and administrative system is the timing of action and the lead times needed to meet deadlines. The guidelines place particular emphasis on these points.

Definitions and dimensions of distance learning

Throughout these guidelines, the terms 'providing institution' and 'provider' are used to indicate the higher education institution that is responsible for designing the distance learning system, for designing and delivering programmes of study and for the academic standard of the award granted upon successful completion of that programme. Other terms are used which are intended to convey a function - such as local agent (where the function is normally limited to administrative or organisational activities), local tutor, travelling teacher- for which other words could be substituted according to choice but which are expected to be readily understandable.

Distance learning is approached in many different ways. These guidelines have not been designed to apply equally in all respects to every individual arrangement. They take a generic view based on underlying principles or precepts. But in doing so they also take particular account of a number of approaches which, while not necessarily present in all arrangements, do frequently occur in many of them. The component elements of these approaches, and the meaning given to them, are set out below as four dimensions of distance learning. The dimensions do not refer to different models of distance learning and should not be construed as setting out alternative forms or distinct systems of distance learning. They refer to certain distinguishable aspects that are commonly found, under varying labels, as components within systems of distance learning.

The terms used to refer to four dimensions of distance learning are as follows:

Materials-based learning. This dimension of a system of distance learning refers to all the learning resource materials made available by the programme provider to students studying at a distance. The range and diversity of materials provided can be great. It may include printed, audio or audio-visual material, experimental equipment and material on the world wide web and other electronic or computer-based resources. Materials forming the basis of study may also be drawn from local public providers or resources accessible locally - as with local libraries, local book

suppliers or information on the world wide web. The scope of materials provided may range from statements simply of syllabuses and learning outcomes to complex collections of multi-media materials structured to support self-study. The methods for distributing materials to form the basis of study include personal delivery to students by travelling teachers, despatch to the student through the post, distribution through electronic communication and personal collection by the student from a distribution point.

Programme components delivered by travelling teachers. This dimension refers to staff of the providing institution travelling on a periodic basis to the location of the student to deliver components of the programme. The delivery may be concentrated into a period of intensive classroom-based study for a group of students or be arranged on a scheduled basis for an individual student. The scope of the functions carried out by travelling teachers may include initial orientation; delivery of learning materials; intensive teaching of the programme; tutorial support; student development and guidance; assessment; and gathering feedback. The operations of travelling teachers may be supported and supplemented by a local agent.

Learning supported locally. This dimension involves the providing institution employing persons specifically to undertake certain defined functions for the local support of students following the programme. It may involve administrative tasks for which a local agent is contracted and/or specified teaching functions for which a local tutor is engaged. An example of the latter might be the provision of residential weekend workshops or the like.

Learning supported from the providing institution remotely from the student. This dimension refers to defined support and specified components of teaching provided remotely for individual distant students by a tutor from the providing institution. The forms of communication between the tutor and student may include postal correspondence in print or by audio or video-cassette, telephone, fax, email and the Internet. It may be solely between tutor and individual student or may include voice, video or computer-based conferencing. The scope of the teaching may be limited to defined components of the programme or form a larger and more open-ended component.

The terms set out above refer to dimensions that are common components within systems of distance learning but for which there are no uniform labels. They have been briefly elaborated here so that the content of the guidelines is more readily understandable. They may also help readers to understand better some of the structural aspects of distance learning. In practice, different distance learning systems will rely more on one dimension than another and may not contain some of the dimensions at all, such as that of 'travelling teacher'. Other aspects or dimensions of distance learning systems that are dealt with in the guidelines, such as assessment and examining, do not need to be explained.

How the guidelines are structured

The guidelines are arranged under six headings, each dealing with an aspect where quality assurance is likely to require attention in a particular way when study is by distance learning:

- System design;
- Programme design, approval and review;
- The management of programme delivery;
- Student development and support;
- Student communication and representation;
- Student assessment.

Each section contains generic precepts and outline guidance. The precepts identify those key matters which an institution might reasonably be expected to be able to demonstrate that it is addressing effectively through its own relevant quality assurance mechanisms. The purpose of the accompanying outline guidance is to offer suggestions on quality assurance and control which institutions can use, elaborate, and adapt according to their own needs, traditions, cultures and decision-making processes.

At the end of the guidelines, in Appendix 1, are a series of exemplifying questions which have been included to provide further prompts to the detailed consideration of matters covered by the precepts and outline guidance. They are grouped by guideline and are formulated as a series of questions that an institution might wish to ask itself, before it establishes distance learning activities or as it considers and reviews its current arrangements.

These guidelines need to be considered in conjunction with the various sections of the formal Code of Practice for Quality Assurance in Higher Education which QAA is in the process of preparing, especially the section dealing with the quality assurance of collaborative provision. The six sections in these guidelines build on the wider principles that apply generally to higher education. They pre-suppose and assume that the general precepts and guidance contained in the QAA Code of Practice will directly underpin the distance learning activity.

The combined attention to the guidelines set out here, and to the more generally applicable precepts and outline guidance, is intended to support total quality and effectiveness. The strength of the chain of system and programme design, implementation, delivery, support, student communication and assessment, and the matters addressed in more general precepts such as those concerning external examining, lies in its weakest link. Those responsible for the overall management of a programme of distance learning should monitor all aspects of provision for weakness, and should be able to take timely corrective action at that point. The effectiveness of programme management will depend upon the infrastructure for

distance learning activity which exists in the providing institution. This infrastructure may be integrated with, or be separated from, that established for institution-centred provision (where this exists), and may be more, or less, sensitive to the funding arrangements associated with distance learning programmes of study. These guidelines do not cover general management practice in the providing institution, but users will not wish to lose sight of the fact that poor general management or an inadequate administrative infrastructure can negate otherwise good practice in the provision of distance learning.

The guidelines

Guideline 1: System design - the development of an integrated approach

Precepts

1

Higher education by distance learning should be underpinned by principles relevant generally to higher education. An institution intending to offer distance learning programmes of study should design and manage its operations in a way that applies those principles and, at the same time, takes full account of considerations specific to teaching its students at a distance.

2

The provision of programmes of study by distance learning should form part of an explicit strategy for achieving an institution's stated aims, and the distance learning system or systems should be designed and developed in ways that will give effect to the strategy.

3

Prior to offering programmes of study by distance learning, an institution should explicitly design and test its system for administering and teaching students at a distance and plan for contingencies in order to meet its stated aims in terms of academic quality and standards.

4

An institution should safeguard its position in respect of the law in any country in which it is proposed that programmes of study should be made available by distance learning.

Outline guidance

An institution might be expected to:

- *establish and make publicly available a policy for assuring the quality and academic standards of the education that the institution provides at a distance;*
- *identify the processes and range of tasks involved in designing programmes of study, in designing and preparing learning materials and in delivering programmes to students studying at a distance, recognising that these processes and tasks are not the same in important respects as those applying in institution-centred teaching;*

- *determine the organisation and distribution of responsibilities appropriate to the system of distance learning;*
- *determine how to identify the characteristics and situation of students projected to study through the system of distance learning;*
- *identify which teaching media would be most suitable to a distance learning system, bearing in mind the educational aims of the programmes of study to be offered, the accessibility to prospective students of various teaching media and their relative costs to providers and students;*
- *determine whether there will be electronic (including telephone), postal and/or local support for distance learning students and, if so, in what forms;*
- *determine an appropriate structure through which to provide student support;*
- *identify, and wherever possible test, the forms and lines of communication to be used between all the parties to be involved, in the context of constraints imposed by the timetable and, where relevant, time zones;*
- *determine the processes that should apply to piloting, or otherwise field testing, learning materials, and to evaluating any locally provided facilities or services on which successful study is assumed to depend;*
- *determine the appropriate schedule for all activities forming part of the designed system and test the feasibility of timetables;*
- *devise processes appropriate to the system of distance learning, as designed, for feedback, review and evaluation of all components and specify how resulting information is to be incorporated into quality management and quality enhancement processes;*
- *incorporate projections on the updating and enhancement of learning materials and ensure that the design and operation of the distance learning system can take account of this updating and enhancement;*
- *prepare contingency plans to provide timely and effective learner support consistent with the standards to which the institution is committed in the event of projections, such as those for students admitted, not being achieved;*
- *where it is proposed to extend the operation of a distance learning programme of study from one country to another, test the system on which it depends in the context of the new country prior to a programme being offered;*
- *where distance learning programmes of study may be made available, establish procedures for reviewing legal requirements concerning any approval for programmes to be offered in a particular country and also requirements under local law in respect of relevant matters including consumer protection, copyright, employment, packaging and postal despatch;*
- *establish a process for reviewing periodically whether the strategy of offering programmes of study by distance learning should be revised or discontinued;*

- *provide for a process under which, in the event of a programme of study being discontinued, due attention is given to meeting the institution's commitments to students registered on the programme.*

Precept

5

A providing institution's plans for offering programmes of study by distance learning should be financially underwritten for the full period during which students will be studying on them and at a level that safeguards the quality and standards to which the institution is committed.

Outline guidance

An institution might be expected to have developed:

- *realistic projections on costs and income including those associated with the distance learning system, each specific programme of study offered and the projected numbers of students and their distribution;*
- *financial plans for programmes of study offered through distance learning which take account of realistic contingencies and are formally approved and underwritten by the providing institution at a level which ensures that any variation between planned and actual financial performance of the activity does not compromise academic standards and that the interests of students will be protected even where assumptions, such as those on the numbers of students registered, do not accord with what was projected;*
- *financial policies which make clear how expenditure and income associated with each activity in preparing and delivering programmes will be apportioned between all parties including between the providing institution, any local agent, tutor and students and how this apportionment varies in relation to student take-up;*
- *procedures providing for reviews of, and decisions on, performance against plans.*

Guideline 2: The establishment of academic standards and quality in programme design, approval and review procedures

Precepts

6

The providing institution is responsible for ensuring that programmes to be offered at a distance are designed so that the academic standards of the awards will be demonstrably comparable with those of awards delivered by the institution in other ways and consistent with any relevant benchmark information recognised within the UK.

7

In designing distance learning programmes of study, and any component modules, a providing institution should ensure explicit and reasoned coherence between, on the one hand, the aims and intended learning outcomes, and, on the other, the strategies for teaching at a distance, the scope of the learning materials and the modes and criteria of assessment.

Outline guidance

Institutional processes for designing programmes and any component modules might be expected to include:

- *a requirement that explicit attention be given to the academic standards appropriate to the programme and associated award, including a formal statement of how the programme conforms with any relevant and authoritative internal or external benchmarks;*
- *the identification of minimum academic prerequisites for the programme, and for each module, and the expression of these in ways that will be understandable in all parts of the world where the programme is to be offered;*
- *specification of the plans for updating learning materials so that these plans, and associated estimated costs, are taken into account in the initial design and preparation of learning materials;*
- *consideration of the strategy for formative and summative assessments including an indication of how summative assessments relate to the learning outcomes specified for the programme and/or module;*
- *a description of the relationship between the strategy for teaching and the stated aims and intended learning outcomes;*
- *provision for the implementation of quality control processes over core components of the programme as designed.*

Precept

8

A providing institution is responsible for ensuring that the design of distance learning programmes of study provides a learning opportunity which gives to students a fair and reasonable chance of achieving the academic standards required for successful completion.

Outline guidance

An institution might be expected to:

- *take account of the skills, knowledge and experience of targeted students and of the circumstances in which students are expected to study using the institution's distance learning system;*
- *be explicit about the basis for selecting the teaching media chosen;*
- *consider and specify in unambiguous detail the learning resources and the support that will be made available directly to students from the providing institution and any assumed or required to be in place at the location of the student, and any to be obtained by the student;*
- *consider how learning materials might be structured to support achievement of the learning outcomes and to encourage the completion of programmes;*
- *consider how learning materials might be made interactive and allow students to gain formative feedback;*
- *specify in detail the schedule of student activities in following the programme of study using the planned system of distance learning;*
- *identify the timetabling implications of any actions to be taken by the providing institution or any local agent or local tutor;*

and in distance learning programmes offered overseas:

- *ensure that where the English language is the medium of learning the academic terminology used to describe a programme of study is readily accessible to non-native speakers;*
- *take account of the impact of local language, culture and educational traditions, and be specific about the language permitted for any local tuition and for assessment.*

Precepts

9

A providing institution should have processes for approving distance learning programmes of study which, while underpinned by principles relevant to all educational programmes, take specific account of the requirements of the system of distance learning adopted and of the opportunities provided for scrutiny.

10

A providing institution's processes for the approval of programmes of study, and any component modules, should include an element of scrutiny external to the institution.

Outline guidance

- *An institution might be expected to have in place procedures which allow distance learning programmes of study, and any component modules, to be considered and, if appropriate, given a relevant level of approval at points in the process when choices can still be made between alternative courses of action. This may be expected to involve, depending on the system of distance learning in use:*
- *distinguishing outline approval of a programme of study and its intended design from final approval of a programme, or any component module, once learning materials have been prepared;*
- *finally approving a programme of study, and any component module, after taking account of the results of field testing and external peer review of the strategy for teaching, the quality of the learning materials and the modes and criteria of assessment;*
- *approving the arrangements for student support by, for example, local tutors and/or through intensive teaching, and approving also any facilities provided at a local centre.*
- *Scrutiny by a person external to an institution might be expected to form part of the final approval of programmes of study and of component modules.*

Precept

11

An institution should ensure that programmes of study and component modules once designed, and in use, are monitored, reviewed and subject to re-approval regularly; in particular an institution should ensure that the content of all learning materials remains current and relevant and that learning materials, teaching strategies and forms of assessment are enhanced in the light of findings from feedback.

Outline guidance

An institution might be expected to have:

- *procedures for monitoring and review which are appropriate to its distance learning system and the programmes of study that are taught using it;*
- *the same general aims for the periodic review of programmes of study where it is offering a programme of study both by distance learning and on an institution-centred basis, but have specific objectives and processes for periodic review that are adapted to the mode of study;*
- *a procedure through which learning materials are verified as to their continued effectiveness, accessibility and currency, and action taken to effect necessary modifications and updating before a new intake of students begins work on a programme, or on a component module;*

- *a procedure for monitoring data on student progress and completion on programmes of study offered by distance learning, for reviewing any consequent implications for the programmes, and for taking appropriate action.*

Guideline 3: The assurance of quality and standards in the management of programme delivery

Precepts

12

The providing institution is responsible for managing the delivery of each distance learning programme of study in a manner that safeguards the academic standards of the award.

13

The providing institution is responsible for ensuring that each distance learning programme of study is delivered in a manner that provides, in practice, a learning opportunity which gives students a fair and reasonable chance of achieving the academic standards required for successful completion.

Outline guidance

In exercising its responsibility of ensuring that distance learning programmes are delivered using the system designed for the purpose, an institution might be expected to:

- *state the respective entitlements, responsibilities and accountability of the several parties in respect of the programme of study under the distance learning system, including, as appropriate, those of the student, any local agent, local tutor, travelling teacher and those associated with the programme in the providing institution, these to be contained in written, binding, agreements;*
- *specify the qualifications and experience required of any local administrative agent and academic tutor; formally approve and appoint any directly-employed local staff after operating a due recruitment process, and appraise staff performance regularly;*
- *plan and conduct briefing, training and staff development for those filling both administrative and academic roles associated with delivering the distance learning programme;*
- *operate a procedure for approving and reviewing any, and every, local support centre to be employed in delivering the programme;*
- *establish reliable systems for maintaining effective communication;*
- *make clear statements to each relevant party on the expected communication between **the several parties in the distance learning system:***

- *establish, and make clear to each relevant party, the timetables along with the action required of each party in delivering the programme or module;*
- *provide for access by students to tutors on a sufficient, regular and known basis;*
- *ensure that all enquiries from students are handled promptly and sympathetically;*
- *ensure that student progress is monitored regularly and that students are provided with helpful comments on their progress in relation to the stated learning outcomes for their programme of study;*
- *detail **what** student and staff records are to be kept, by whom and in what form;*
- *establish and operate a system of quality controls which include regular monitoring and review against defined levels of performance of processes undertaken by local agents, local tutors, travelling teachers and those conducting teaching at a distance;*
- *specify the responsibilities of different parties in the distance learning system to take measures to protect students and any local staff in the event of communication failures or other emergencies;*
- *maintain full records on the action taken in delivering each programme.*

Precept

14

Learning, although at a distance, should be treated as an activity involving all participants in the system, in which monitoring, review and feedback to those who manage the programmes of study are used regularly to enhance all components of teaching, learning and the system of delivery.

Outline guidance

The institution might want to:

- *specify the procedures to be used for feedback, monitoring and review of the delivery of distance learning provision and determine the relationship between these procedures and its quality assurance system;*
- *include within its procedures provision for regular monitoring and appraisal of the programme of study as a whole and of each component in the system for delivering it;*
- *evaluate the effectiveness of teaching, learning and assessment strategies in the programme of study;*
- *record the findings from feedback, review and evaluation, and also the action taken on the findings, with the purpose of enhancing all aspects of the institution's provision.*

Guideline 4: Student development and support

Precept

15

In respect of students taught at a distance, a providing institution should give explicit attention to its responsibility for supporting and promoting autonomous learning and enabling learners to take personal control of their own development. An institution should set realistic aims, devise practical methods for achieving them, and monitor its practice.

Outline guidance

An institution should consider as a matter of policy how far its distance learning activities are intended to promote autonomous learning and to enable students studying at a distance to take further control of their own development.

An institution should give attention to, and make explicit statements about (including statements to students):

- *its aims in promoting student development and autonomous learning, how far achieving these aims will be integral to the programme of study and what means it will use to promote the stated aims;*
- *the extent to which the institution will make available educational and personal guidance and the manner in which any such guidance will be provided;*
- *the extent to which vocational information and guidance is provided and how any such guidance will be made available;*
- *the processes by which it will evaluate the effectiveness of the action taken to secure its stated aims and how it will use feedback to enhance institutional performance.*

Guideline 5: Student communication and representation

Precept

16

A providing institution should meet the need of its students who are studying at a distance for information that is particularly full and clear about the nature and expectations of their programme of study; the relationship between achievement and assessment, academic progress and accumulation of credit; the characteristics of the distance learning system and how students interact with it. The information provided should be conveyed in a way that enables them to make informed decisions about their own education, and to monitor their progress against clear expectations of achievement.

17

A providing institution should monitor the effectiveness of information provided to students and, in the light of its findings, take steps to enhance its provision.

18

An institution should determine what means of student representation are appropriate and realistic for students on distance learning programmes of study and should provide these students with accurate information about them.

Outline guidance

The institution will need to consider what information is required by both prospective and registered students and how it can provide information with the necessary clarity. This is likely to include, at least:

- a statement of the responsibilities of the institution to the student, and of the entitlements and responsibilities of the student, in respect of the programme of study under the distance learning system;
- a clear statement about the nature of the award involved and the information which a successful candidate would expect to see recorded on the award certificate and/or the transcript;
- information on any professional recognition formally accorded to the award;
- information on programme admission requirements and the institution's admission criteria;
- information on the content and coverage of the programme of study and of any component modules;
- information on the intended outcomes of the programme of study;
- information on the characteristics of the distance learning system;
- information on the assessment methods and requirements and the procedures followed in determining results;
- the timetable for all activities including the deadlines for the submission of any assignments and the consequences of not meeting deadlines;
- information on the communications the student can expect from different parties in the institution;
- the fees and charges, when these will be required to be paid, how payment is to be made and how the institution will confirm receipt of payments;
- information about the time commitments required by the programme of study;

- information on the respective roles of academic and administrative staff, both local and remote, as they relate to students in following their programme of study;
- information on students' entitlement to support and guidance at their own location and any opportunity for direct contact with the providing institution and its staff;
- information on the learning support which students can expect on an individual basis, and on the basis of a local or networked group;
- information on the availability of networks and frameworks through **which** students can seek support at a distance;
- information on the mechanisms for regular feedback to students on their performance, both formative and summative;
- information on the arrangements made by the institution for access to learning resources and support services in local agencies or institutions, other than those made available directly by the providing institution, including through libraries and guidance and counselling services;
- information on how the institution safeguards the reliability of assessment;
- information on the procedures for dealing with detected instances of impersonation, plagiarism or fraud;
- a statement of the institution's aims with regard to the promotion of student development and autonomous learning;
- information on the formal status and rights of students within the institution including any which result from the provisions of student charters;
- information on procedures to handle students' representation and feedback including provision of means to contribute to discussion of quality assurance policies and their operation;
- information on appeals, complaints and grievance procedures including procedures for students to make representation directly to the providing institution;
- information on the processes through which the institution secures feedback, and reviews, evaluates and acts on its findings;

and in distance learning programmes offered overseas:

- information on the language of instruction and assessment;
- information on the methods used to establish language proficiency;
- information on any requirements or restrictions imposed by UK professional bodies or overseas governments in respect of the recognition of the awards;
- information on the protocols governing the translation of any material forming part of assessment.

Guideline 6: Student assessment**Precepts**

19

A providing institution should be able to demonstrate publicly that summative assessment procedures used for programmes studied at a distance are appropriate for the mode of study, for the circumstances in which the programmes are studied and for the nature of the assessment being undertaken; that assessments are conducted and marked, and results promulgated, in a reliable and properly regulated manner; and that, in all respects, assessment procedures accord with the requirement to safeguard academic standards.

20

A providing institution should also be able to demonstrate that the summative assessment of a module, and/or a programme of study as a whole, adequately assesses students' achievement of the learning outcomes stated for the module and/or programme of study.

21

A providing institution should have direct control of the summative assessment process and the determination of results.

22

A providing institution should employ formative assessment as part of the design of distance learning programmes of study.

23

A providing institution should monitor systematically the soundness of its assessment procedures and practice and be ready to amend them in the light of feedback.

Outline guidance

In making arrangements for student assessment, matters which institutions should consider include:

- *the educational rationale for the formative and summative assessment strategy for the programme of study and/or module;*
- *the appropriateness of the level and promptness of feedback to students on their performance and progress through the assessment process;*
- *its ability to demonstrate that it has appropriate processes for checking that students' work is their own;*

- *the means for co-ordinating the marking standards of all involved in the marking of summative assignments;*
- *the level of confidence in the security of its arrangements for any locally-administered and assessed summative course-work assignments;*
- *the arrangements for monitoring marking standards applied to course work assessment;*
- *where the institution does not itself directly administer and invigilate all examinations, the clarity and comprehensiveness of the rules, instructions, registers and other documentation applying to each phase of examinations, and the extent to which these will be understandable by persons unfamiliar with the required examining practices;*
- *the reporting requirements to apply to all assessment events conducted on behalf of the institution;*
- *the monitoring of examinations administered on behalf of the institution;*
- *the availability and practicality of using oral or viva voce examinations for determining borderline cases of degree classification when students are at a distance;*
- *the effects of time zones, and the opportunity for the ready transfer of information about examinations, when administering time-controlled assessments in widely differing locations;*

where a distance learning programme is a variant of an institution-centred programme:

- *the appropriateness to distance learning of the assessment mechanisms used for institution-centred provision;*
- *the access of external examiners to the assessed course-work and examination scripts of students learning at a distance;*

where a distance learning programme is permitted to operate and be assessed in a language other than English and where a facility with English is not an expected or stated outcome:

- *the availability of staff of the providing and awarding institution with both the full linguistic competence and subject expertise to work in the language in which assessment, and monitoring of assessment, is to be undertaken;*
- *where translation of assessment material is used, dependable procedures for ensuring the accuracy and appropriateness of the translations in an academic context;*
- *the level of confidence in the ability of examiners, including all external examiners, to work fluently in the language of assessment: where high levels of confidence are not present, work undertaken for summative assessment should be in English.*

Appendix 1

Exemplifying questions

These questions are offered as examples of the types of questions which institutions might wish to ask themselves before they establish distance learning activities or as they consider and review their current arrangements. They are grouped by guideline and relate to both the precepts and outline guidance contained under each guideline.

Guideline 1: System design - the development of an Integrated approach

- *Does our institutional policy on teaching and learning have recognisable implications for the design of the system, or systems, we are using for distance learning?*
- *How should the system of distance learning we use reflect our institution's policy on teaching and learning?*
- *What teaching and learning strategy guides our distance learning provision and does this strategy relate to the teaching and learning strategy for any institution-centred provision?*
- *What is our educational and pedagogical rationale for introducing a distance learning mode of study?*
- *What are the educational practices which underpin our distance learning system? How soundly grounded are these educational practices?*
- *What evidence is there that the teaching media we have identified for use suit the needs of our target students?*
- *Do our selected teaching media offer students sufficient variety to suit different learning styles?*
- *Are we already teaching the same programme of study using a different mode of delivery, and, if so, how will policy for assuring quality and standards need to be changed?*
- *What modifications do we need to make to our established policies and administrative processes in order to accommodate distance learning programmes of study and distant students?*
- *Should we design one system, with optional variations, for teaching students at a distance on all programmes of study or should we design multiple systems, each one for a specific programme of study?*
- *Have we asked ourselves whether a unique system should be permitted for each separate programme of study?*

- *Does our distance learning system take full account of the expected or intended balance between dependence on self-study learning materials and the use of scheduled teaching as part of the programme?*
- *Is there a clear, up-to-date description of our distance learning system and of the role in it of all participants?*
- *Do we intend to evaluate the overall system of distance learning separately from the review of individual programmes of study?*
- *Do we need to use local administrative agents? If so, what specific purposes are they to serve? If a local agent is necessary, what form is most appropriate to our requirements, the needs of our projected students, and the environment in which we shall be offering the programme of study?*
- *If our system includes a local agent, which office or office-holder within our institution is to have direct responsibility for the management of relations with the agent?*
- *In the projections on costs and income, have we made realistic estimates of the amount of staff time needed to support the delivery of a programme?*
- *Have we made realistic estimates of staff time needed to keep learning materials current and to enhance programmes of study in the light of feedback?*
- *Have our financial plans fully taken into account the direct and indirect costs of technical support staff, the production and distribution of learning resources, and all costs realistically associated with implementing any hardware and software required to administer a distance learning programme?*
- *Where computer-based learning or other electronic technologies are employed, have we made adequate provision for the costs of training teaching staff in the proper use of the technology?*
- *Who is responsible for reviewing and evaluating financial performance against initial financial plans under the system for distance learning? When is this review to be undertaken and what alternative options can be considered and decisions reached in the light of the review?*

Guideline 2: The establishment of academic standards and quality in programme design, approval and review procedures

- *Has the programme of study academic and intellectual currency and will it require the attainment of standards appropriate to the level and nature of the award?*
- *Will the scope of the learning materials be sufficient for our students to achieve the learning outcomes that we have specified?*
- *What contribution to the programme of study is to be made by specially prepared self-study learning materials, already available learning resources (including on the Internet), locally accessible resources (e.g. local library), local face-to-face teaching*

- from travelling teachers and/or local tutors, teaching by correspondence or electronically mediated, student group activities?*
- *What training and staff development should we be providing on the preparation and enhancement of distance learning materials?*
 - *in designing programmes of study what attention are we giving explicitly to reviewing what has been identified previously as good practice?*
 - *What part of the teaching will be directed to students individually and what part to students as a group?*
 - *What learning objectives/outcomes can be advanced best by any residential or non-residential group study schools?*
 - *Are we exploiting the flexibility associated with distance learning in order to enhance learning opportunities?*
 - *What use can we plan to make of problem-based learning related to students' own employment?*
 - *What support materials will we be providing to those involved away from our own institution in organising and conducting teaching, student group activities and on the conduct of formative and summative assessment?*
 - *in preparing material to support any local tutors, how will we ensure that the material takes into account the context in which particular students will be studying?*
 - *Are there any legal restrictions either on the use of certain materials or on their transmission using the chosen means of communication (for example, can video cassettes be dispatched to a particular country without prior clearance)?*
 - *Do we have a secure process for ensuring that copyright requirements are met?*
 - *If part, or all, of the planned teaching is to be delivered in concentrated periods, how can we organise this so as not to put at risk any equivalence between a programme of study delivered by both distance learning and at the provider's location?*
 - *in programmes of study using computer-based learning or other electronic technologies have we ensured that there is an explicit policy for dealing with changes and upgrading of hardware and software?*
 - *What is the profile of our prospective students and what features of their situation need we take into account in planning and preparing the programme of study and component modules?*
 - *Where an existing programme of study, offered within the institution, is to be delivered through distance learning, are we taking full account of differences in the skills, knowledge, experience, situation and culture of the projected distance learners from those studying the programme within the institution while, at the same time, maintaining equivalence of academic standards between the two programmes of study?*
- *Are we stating the learning objectives and outcomes in a way that will be clear to students and will students recognise the way learning is structured to facilitate the achievement of outcomes?*
 - *in overseas provision, what language is to be used in the programme of study, and what proficiency will projected students need to have in the language? If a language other than English is to be used, what protocols will govern any necessary translations?*
 - *in what ways does the content of programmes of study and component modules recognise the opportunities and constraints of the environment in which the programmes and modules may be studied and the situations and expectations of prospective students?*
 - *How do we encourage students to be active learners?*
 - *How are we pacing and structuring students' learning?*
 - *Are we introducing frequent opportunities for students to use self-assessment and to obtain formative feedback so allowing them to monitor their own progress?*
 - *Where students are projected to be individual, isolated learners, are we making information, instructions and guidance sufficiently full, explicit and clear?*
 - *Do we provide students with clear information on what learning materials they are responsible for obtaining for themselves? Do students receive this information in time for them to act on it and still work according to the planned timetable for their studies? Do we tell students the probable cost of obtaining materials for which they are responsible?*
 - *Where they will be required to use computers or other electronic technology, what support will we make available to students to familiarise themselves with required technology at the start of the programme of study?*
 - *in the situations in which students may study, what local technical support can we assume will be available to those students who experience difficulties in setting up or maintaining essential equipment? Have our assumptions been tested?*
 - *Have we assessed the relative costs of technologies? Have we made assessments of what equipment it will be realistic for students to be required to buy?*
 - *Have we assessed the estimated lifetime of any technology we propose that students should use and have we determined whether its cost and life span presents good value to students and our own institution?*
 - *Where we are planning to use computer-based learning, or other electronic technologies, will the technologies be sufficiently understood by any local agents or tutors and by our students, even when the technologies are not intrinsically relevant to the subject being studied?*
 - *Are we assessing the student work-load involved in studying the programme or module against realistic norms?*

- *Where programmes are to operate outside the UK using computer-based learning, have we taken steps to ensure that equipment specifications and standards are compatible?*
- *Where computer-based learning is to be used, are we arranging for local agents to make essential equipment available to students or are we expecting students to acquire their own equipment?*
- *Are we arranging the learning materials so that they are directed to the stated learning objectives?*
- *Have we consciously adapted the processes of design and approval, as applied to programmes of study using other forms of delivery, to take into account the particular needs, opportunities and constraints associated with the distance learning programme of study, and of any constituent modules, without compromising quality control?*
- *What criteria are we using to assess the suitability of the teaching strategy, the content, structure and production standard of learning materials, the media of communication employed and other learning support to meet module and programme objectives?*
- *What arrangements do we have to review and approve the quality of learning resources, and against what criteria, eg academic currency, pedagogic effectiveness, relationship to stated learning outcomes, reflection of house style, legibility, production standards, etc?*
- *What arrangements are we making for field-testing learning resources with students?*
- *Do we have the timetable for considering and approving programmes of study, and individual modules, allow realistically for significant changes to be made or for the contingency of abandoning a programme of study or component module?*
- *Have we adapted the processes of review, as applied to programmes of study using other modes, to take into account the particular needs, opportunities and constraints associated with the distance learning programme of study, without compromising quality control?*
- *Can we claim fairly both that the same aims apply to the periodic review of distance learning programmes of review and to programmes taught using different modes, and also that specific objectives have been appropriately stated for reviewing distance learning programmes of study?*
- *Do we have a process for reviewing regularly and systematically whether the content of learning materials, forming an integral part of our distance learning programmes of study, remains current? how do we act on the results of the review? Do we make provision for the staffing, production, briefing and training and other costs associated with revising material and keeping it current?*
- *Have we arranged for the internal validation of the academic content of any Web-based resources, which are integral to the syllabus but where ownership resides beyond the providing institution? Are procedures in place to verify that Web sites, to*

Which access is required by students, have not been withdrawn and that they continue to comprise current and relevant material? Can we be sure that no change will be made in access charges to externally-authored Web sites during the period of their required use?

- *Do we have a timetable for reviewing feedback, and also data on student progress and completion, and for acting on its findings in a way that enhances the design of programmes of study and any component modules?*
- *Does information coming from students confirm, or undermine, our claim that the design of the distance learning programme of study results in a learning opportunity which gives to students a fair and reasonable chance of achieving the academic standards for successful completion?*

Guideline 3: The assurance of quality and standards in the management of programme delivery

- *Do we have a named programme manager and what other named parties are there in our distance learning system?*
- *Where do we define and state the responsibilities of different parties for, for example, publicity; selection, admission and registration of students; collection of fees; recruitment of any local teachers; the despatch of learning materials; record keeping; other administrative communication; providing information to students on their progress; informing any local tutors about their performance?*
- *What is the planned division of responsibility between any local agent, local tutor, travelling teacher or distance teacher?*
- *What are the stated criteria for use in the selection of any local agent?*
- *What experience and expertise do we require of any local tutor, for example, subject knowledge, knowledge of local culture, higher education teaching experience, experience of similar academic programmes and of delivery at a distance?*
- *How do we make sure that local tutors and travelling teachers are proficient in the language used in the learning materials and in assessments and, if this is permitted to be different, in the language of tuition?*
- *What arrangements have we made for involvement - and by whom in the institution - in the appointment of any local agent and in the selection and appointment of local tutors on the programme?*
- *As well as expertise in their academic subjects, do any travelling teachers have suitable expertise in the modes of working required of students by the designed system of distance education?*
- *What initial briefing and training, and to whom, are we arranging to be given on the system of distance learning and individual roles and responsibilities in it?*

- *What initial staff development shall toe be giving to local agents and tutors on the aims and design of the programme of study, the characteristics of students studying at a distance and the management and delivery of the programme?*
- *What initial briefing do we give to our staff on the time-management implications for students resulting from computer-based distance learning?*
- *Where computer-based learning is employed, what briefing and training are we providing for teachers regarding the teaching schedule, contributions to tutorial-style discussion (eg computer conferencing) and moderation and supervision of electronically-mediated discussion groups?*
- *What, If any, variations to our admission requirements for institution-centred provision are we permitting to attest to a student's ability to cope with the demands of the distance learning programme of study?*
- *How are we to compare the profile of students assumed in the design of the programme with that of the students actually admitted? What provision are we making for modifying the content and design of the programme of study to take account of any differences?*
- *Can our timetable for action realistically allow students to work according to the study plan for the module and programme of study?*
- *Have we identified and stated standards of performance for specified tasks? Have we determined the period within which action is to be taken in responding to student queries and in returning student assignments? How are we monitoring performance against these standards?*
- *Who is responsible for monitoring the quality of comments to students on their progress?*
- *Where postal communication is to be used, does the timetable take fully into account the vagaries of the postal distribution system? Have we tested these assumptions?*
- *What steps are being taken, and by whom, to encourage students to form face-to-face self-help groups or student remote networks?*
- *Who will be responsible for moderating any programme-based computer conferencing? Who will be responsible for monitoring computer conferencing against a code of conduct for participants?*
- *Who is to provide local administrative support for travelling teachers, eg in booking venues and facilities and accommodation for teachers and for students, arranging for local publicity and for distributing information to enquirers?*
- *How do we check the suitability of local teaching venues and facilities in advance of a visit by travelling teachers?*
- *Where we have arranged for management of programmes of study to be shared between different staff within the providing institution, and between the institution and any local agent and local tutor, how do we specify the respective responsibilities of the different parties for the quality of programme management?*
- *How are we arranging for continuing staff development for any local agents or tutors?*
- *in overseas provision what continuing staff development are we giving to travelling teachers to enhance their teaching effectiveness in unfamiliar environments and where students may be studying in other than their first language?*
- *Where a programme of study is organised around sessions conducted by travelling teachers, what access will students have to the teachers between sessions?*
- *How do we provide for the effectiveness of continuing teaching, including that using electronic technologies, to be monitored?*
- *What record do we require to be kept of telephone, email and other communications with local agents, tutors and students?*
- *Where the use of web-based resources is either recommended or required, what are we doing to accommodate students who find themselves unable to access the Internet?*
- *From whom, in what form and How frequently do our students learn of their performance and progress?*
- *How are we conveying to the different parties involved a sense that learning involves a partnership and How do we plan to achieve a co-ordinated approach when there may be unfamiliar divisions of responsibilities and different degrees of physical separation?*
- *What reports do we require of travelling teachers after each set of study sessions?*
- *How do we identify unsatisfactory teaching?*
- *How rapidly do we identify unsatisfactory teaching and How rapidly do we remedy this?*
- *Have we set down clearly and explicitly, and made procedures known to all relevant parties, How difficulties requiring urgent attention in the distance learning system are to be reported?*
- *Are we making remote sites aware of the procedures to follow in reporting technical failures? Are we putting 'quick response' mechanisms and structures in place so that urgent matters are addressed speedily?*
- *Have we arranged for fail-safe measures involving alternative emergency methods of communication to be put in place in the event of a failure of the primary channel of communication eg mail, electronic or IT based?*
- *How have we assigned responsibilities for evaluating the quality of the programme, the effectiveness of the teaching, the nature of the students' experience and How effectively the programme of study has been managed?*
- *Where and How are students informed about the processes of programme and module monitoring and review and have we explained to them How these relate to the institution's overall processes of quality assurance?*

- Does feedback allow us to identify factors relating to student progression and non-completion?
- What arrangements do we have to allow us to give constructive feedback to any local agent and local tutor on their performance in the management and delivery of the programme of study?
- Can we be sure that feedback on the effectiveness of current provision results in enhancements to the delivery of programmes of study at a distance? Is the feedback we get evaluated? Do we identify and record good practice and do we keep a record of consequential action?
- What conclusions can we draw from feedback on the delivery of the programme of study about our commitment to provide a learning opportunity which gives students a fair and reasonable chance of achieving the academic standards for successful completion? What action are we taking on these conclusions?

Guideline 4: Student development and support

- What, If any, orientation, support, advice or assistance do we provide to students initially in order to prepare them for self-direction in their studies and for the management of their learning?
- What support do we give to students as part of their orientation in order to help them to become competent in the use of equipment and technology integral to their study?
- Do we notify students of a named person to contact where they have general questions concerning their programme of study or questions on problems of studying at a distance in higher education? Do we tell students what forms of communication they should use -for example, by phone at specified times, by correspondence, by email, by fax? Do we inform students of the institution's quality standards in acknowledging and responding to enquiries?
- What help, counselling or advisory services do we make available to students for them to consult at their discretion?
- How do we respond to students who indicate that they are having difficulties with their studies?
- What, If any, facilities and support services, beyond those forming an integral part of a student's particular programme of study, are we providing to create a learning environment?
- What responsibility, If any, do we assign to a local agent to create a general learning environment accessible locally to students studying on a distance learning programme of study?
- How do we handle students' applications for deferments of their programmes - Within the limits of what the regulations allow - and How do we evaluate applications that involve checking the validity of circumstances that make applications for special treatment permissible?

- Should our students on distance learning programmes of study have access to vocational guidance on the same basis as students on campus? If so, how should we ensure this?
- If vocational guidance is not made available to students studying at a distance, has this been made explicit in initial information for applicants and students?
- Should we be providing students on distance learning programmes of study with information about publicly available careers information and guidance and, If so, How should we do this?
- What means do we have for gaining feedback on the effectiveness of action taken to achieve the institution's aims in encouraging student development and providing support? What commitments do we make for acting on feedback?

Guideline 5: Student communication and representation

- Do we provide students with information about the institution and its organisation in a form that is comprehensible to them and allows them to understand the institutional context for their responsibilities and entitlement? How do we know that this information is understood?
- Do we make clear to students prior to registration any requirement to attend residential seminars or schools? Does that information include the timing and costs of any such residential seminars?
- in publicity for the programme of study, do we include a clear statement of the required skills in dealing with communication technology?
- Do we make prospective students fully aware of any requirements to use Web-based resources? Are students given an indication of estimated costs?
- Have we stated clearly the technical requirements for the proper operation of courseware and the action to be taken by the student in the event of equipment failure?
- How do we make students fully aware of the existence and functioning of learner support procedures to assist with electronic communication?
- What guidance do we give to students on the different ways in which they may use the learning materials?
- What checks do we require to be made, and by whom, of any written information and guidance prepared by local tutors when these form part of the system?
- How do we organise student representation? Where there are also campus-based students, How do we arrange the representation of students at a distance in relation to that for campus students?
- Where the distance learning system includes use of travelling teachers, do these teachers have a stated responsibility for obtaining or monitoring student opinion?

Guideline 6: Student assessment

- *Do the forms of summative assessment that we use test effectively whether students have achieved the expected learning outcomes of the programme of study?*
- *Have we reviewed and revised the rules, instructions and documentation applying to the assessment of summative course-work and the conduct of examinations, to take account of different expectations and a different educational culture in the place where the programme of study is to be offered and where it is to be assessed?*
- *How will we verify students' claims for additional time in submitting course work, or for special circumstances to be taken into consideration in assessing course work or examination performance?*
- *What briefing and training are we giving to any local agent and local tutor and to students on the rules, procedures, conventions and practices relating to the summative assessment of course-work and to examinations?*
- *What is the relationship between formative assessment and summative assessment? Will the formative assessment allow students to monitor their progress?*
- *How have we specified the distribution of responsibilities between travelling teachers and any local tutors for marking formative and summative course-work?*
- *What responsibility do travelling teachers have during visits for assessing students' course-work assignments, supervising assessment events, monitoring and moderating marking by any local tutors, conducting oral examinations and hearing student grievances and appeals?*
- *Where students' course-work is marked by local tutors, what arrangements have we made to co-ordinate marking standards?*
- *What arrangements have we made for monitoring and moderating the marking of any local tutors?*
- *What proportion of summative assessment should we be conducting under controlled conditions to safeguard the security of judgements about the quality of students' performance?*
- *What procedures for verification do we rely on where students are mainly or wholly assessed by project and/or course work?*
- *What guidance do we provide to students, and at what point in their studies, on the form of unseen examinations?*
- *Are we subjecting to prior inspection the places in which examinations are proposed to be held? Does approval depend on an inspection?*
- *Do we require those responsible for invigilating examinations to submit a formal invigilator's report following every examination?*
- *Where local examination script markers are used, what procedures have we instituted for their approval, briefing and training, and for monitoring, moderating and standardising marking?*

Appendix 2**The precepts**

The precepts contained in the guidelines are collected together here for ease of reference.

Guideline 1 : System design - the development of an integrated approach**1**

Higher education by distance learning should be underpinned by principles relevant generally to higher education. An institution intending to offer distance learning programmes of study should design and manage its operations in a way that applies those principles and, at the same time, takes full account of considerations specific to teaching its students at a distance.

2

The provision of programmes of study by distance learning should form part of an explicit strategy for achieving an institution's stated aims and the distance learning system or systems should be designed and developed in ways that will give effect to the strategy.

3

Prior to offering programmes of study by distance learning, an institution should explicitly design and test its system for administering and teaching students at a distance and plan for contingencies in order to meet its stated aims in terms of quality and academic standards.

4

An institution should safeguard its position in respect of the law in any country in which it is proposed that programmes of study should be made available by distance learning.

5

A providing institution's plans for offering programmes of study by distance learning should be financially underwritten for the full period during which students will be studying on them and at a level that safeguards the quality and standards to which the institution is committed.

Guideline 2: The establishment of academic standards and quality in programme design, approval and review procedures**6**

The providing institution is responsible for ensuring that programmes to be offered at a distance are designed so that the academic standards of the awards will be

demonstrably comparable with those of awards delivered by the institution in other ways and consistent with any relevant benchmark information recognised within the UK.

7

in designing distance learning programmes of study, and any component modules, a providing institution should ensure explicit and reasoned coherence between, on the one hand, the aims and intended learning outcomes, and, on the other, the strategies for teaching at a distance, the scope of the learning materials and the modes and criteria of assessment.

8

A providing institution is responsible for ensuring that the design of distance learning programmes of study provides a learning opportunity which gives to students a fair and reasonable chance of achieving the academic standards required for successful completion.

9

A providing institution should have processes for approving distance learning programmes of study which, while underpinned by principles relevant to all educational programmes, take specific account of the requirements of the system of distance learning adopted and of the opportunities provided for scrutiny.

10

A providing institution's processes for the approval of programmes of study, and any component modules, should include an element of scrutiny external to the institution.

11

An institution should ensure that programmes of study and component modules once designed, and in use, are monitored, reviewed and subject to re-approval regularly; in particular an institution should ensure that the content of all learning materials remains current and relevant and that learning materials, teaching strategies and forms of assessment are enhanced in the light of findings from feedback.

Guideline 3: The assurance of quality and standards in the management of programme delivery

12

The providing institution is responsible for managing the delivery of each distance learning programme of study in a manner that safeguards the academic standards of the award.

13

The providing institution is responsible for ensuring that each distance learning programme of study is delivered in a manner that provides, in practice, a learning opportunity which gives students a fair and reasonable chance of achieving the academic standards required for successful completion.

14

Learning, although at a distance, should be treated as an activity involving all participants in the system, in which monitoring, review and feedback to those who manage the programmes of study are used regularly to enhance all components of teaching, learning and the system of delivery.

Guideline 4: Student development and support

15

in respect of students taught at a distance, a providing institution should give explicit attention to its responsibility for supporting and promoting autonomous learning and enabling learners to take personal control of their own development. An institution should set realistic aims, devise practical methods for achieving them, and monitor its practice.

Guideline 5: Student communication and representation

16

A providing institution should meet the need of its students who are studying at a distance for information that is particularly full and clear about the nature and expectations of their programme of study; the relationship between achievement and assessment, academic progress and accumulation of credit; the characteristics of the distance learning system and how students interact with it. The information provided should be conveyed in a way that enables them to make informed decisions about their own education, and to monitor their progress against clear expectations of achievement.

17

A providing institution should monitor the effectiveness of information provided to students and, in the light of its findings, take steps to enhance its provision.

18

An institution should determine what means of student representation are appropriate and realistic for students on distance learning programmes of study and should provide these students with accurate information about them.

Guideline 6: Student assessment

19

A providing institution should be able to demonstrate publicly that summative assessment procedures used for programmes studied at a distance are appropriate for the mode of study, for the circumstances in which the programmes are studied and for the nature of the assessment being undertaken; that assessments are conducted and marked and results promulgated, in a reliable and properly

regulated manner; and that, in all respects, assessment procedures accord with the requirement to safeguard academic standards.

20

A providing institution should also be able to demonstrate that the summative assessment of a module, and/or a programme of study as a whole, adequately assesses students' achievement of the learning outcomes stated for the module and/or programme of study.

21

A providing institution should have direct control of the summative assessment process and the determination of results.

22

A providing institution should employ formative assessment as part of the design of distance learning programmes of study.

23

A providing institution should monitor systematically the soundness of its assessment procedures and practice and be ready to amend them in the light of feedback.

Appendix 3

The Working Group

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Mr Arthur Brown	QAA
Dr David Buckingham	University of Exeter and QAA
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Mr Peter Williams	QAA - convener

A wide range of experienced practitioners in distance learning assisted the work of the group, and grateful acknowledgement is made to their contribution.

Appendix 4

Other related publications

The working group found the following publications relating to the quality assurance of distance learning to be of particular interest and relevance:

British Council, *Code of Practice of the Educational Counselling Service*. British Council, Manchester: 1995.

Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals, *Recruitment and Support of International Students in UK Higher Education: Code of Practice*. CVCP, London: 1995.

Higher Education Quality Council, *A quality assurance framework for guidance and learner support in higher education: the guidelines*. HEQC, London: 1995.

Higher Education Quality Council, *Guidelines on Quality Assurance 1996*. HEQC, London: 1996.

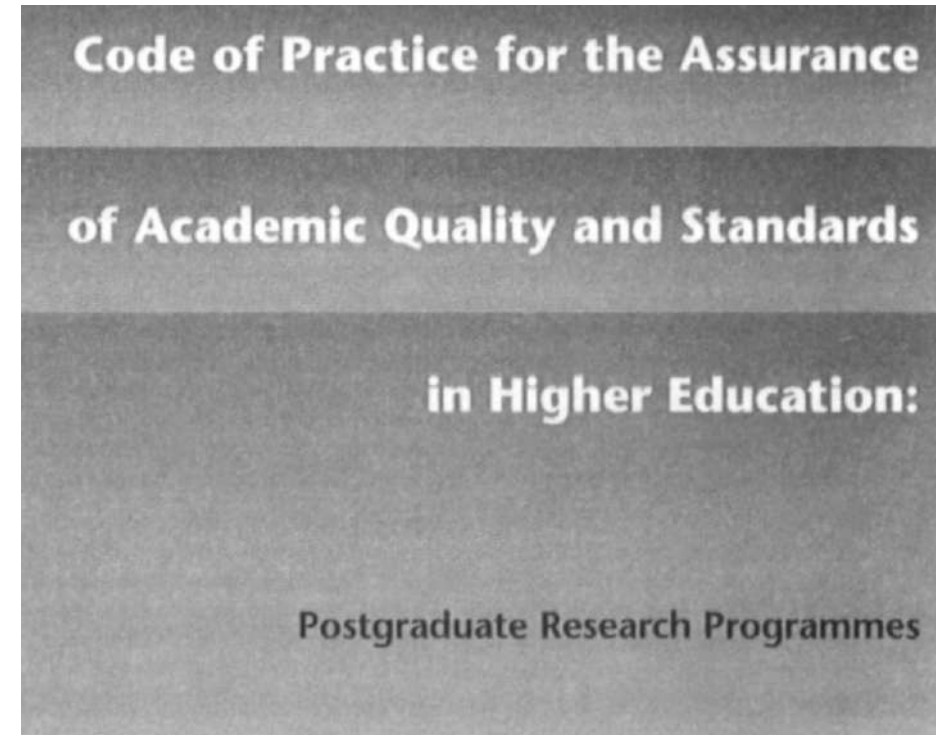
Higher Education Quality Council, *Code of Practice for Overseas Collaborative Provision in Higher Education*. HEQC, London: 1996.

Manpower Services Commission, *Ensuring Quality in Open Learning: The Code of Practice* 2nd edition. MSC: 1990.

QAA, *Code of Practice in Collaborative Provision*. QAA, Gloucester: 1999 (forthcoming).

Open and Distance Learning Quality Council, *Standards in Open and Distance Learning*. ODL Quality Council, London: 1999.

Saturn Quality Working Group, *Saturn Quality Guide for Open and Distance Learning*. Saturn, Amsterdam: 1992.



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Code of Practice for the Assurance of Academic Quality and Standards in Higher Education: Postgraduate Research Programmes

Foreword

This document is a code of practice for the provision of full- and part-time postgraduate research programmes, delivered by higher education institutions either in-house or on a collaborative basis. It is the first of a suite of inter-related documents which, taken together, will comprise an overall Code of Practice for the Assurance of Academic Quality and Standards in Higher Education for the guidance of higher education institutions subscribing to the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA).

The overall Code and its constituent sections are being prepared by the Agency in response both to the Report of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education and its Scottish Committee (the 'Dearing' and 'Garrick' Reports) and the consequent remodelling of the national arrangements for quality assurance in higher education. The completed Code will identify a series of system-wide expectations covering all matters relating to the management of quality and standards in higher education. In so doing, it will provide an authoritative reference point for institutions as they assure, consciously, actively and systematically, the academic quality and standards of their programmes, awards and qualifications. The Code will assume that, taking into account nationally agreed principles and practices, each institution has its own systems for independent verification both of their quality and standards and of the effectiveness of their quality assurance systems. In developing the Code, extensive guidance is being sought from a range of knowledgeable practitioners.

Each section of the Code will be structured into a series of precepts and accompanying outline guidance. The precepts, which are printed in boxes and numbered, identify those key matters which the Agency expects an institution to be able to demonstrate it is addressing effectively through its own relevant quality assurance mechanisms. The accompanying outline guidance is provided to assist institutions in maintaining and enhancing the quality of provision for students and other stakeholders. The guidance is not intended to be either prescriptive or exhaustive: its purpose is to offer a framework for quality assurance and control which institutions can use, elaborate and adapt according to their own needs, traditions, cultures and decision-making processes.

To assist users, the precepts are listed, without the associated guidance, in an annex to the Code.

The extent to which individual institutions are meeting the expectations of the available sections of the Code of Practice will be taken into account by QAA during the course of its quality assurance reviews. The Agency will report regularly on the extent to which higher education institutions individually are meeting these expectations and are discharging their responsibilities for the academic standards

Introduction

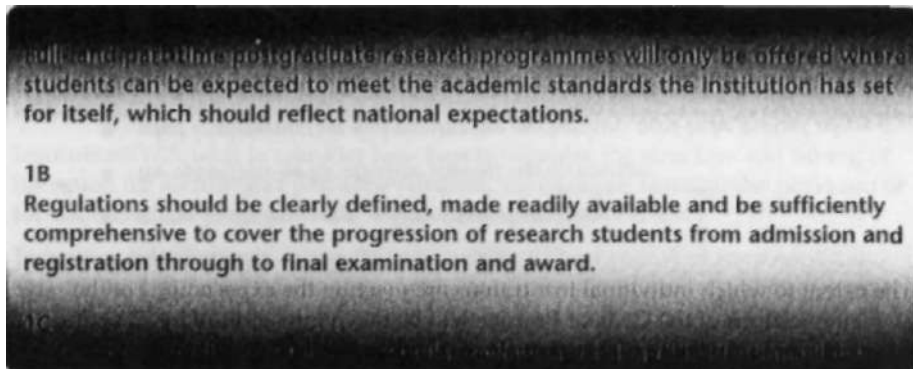
This Code relates to the support and oversight of postgraduate research study. While the document is not specifically targeted at students following postgraduate taught programmes, institutions may consider that parts of it are relevant to certain elements of taught postgraduate programmes including, for example, extended independent study components.

Development of this section of QAA's Code of Practice has been undertaken by a group including representatives of higher education institutions, the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals, the Standing Conference of Principals, the research councils, the British Academy and the National Postgraduate Committee. Those institutions already in the receipt of research council support will have had to satisfy the requirements imposed by these bodies and are likely, therefore, to have in place mechanisms which go further than the requirements of this section of the Code.

With effect from the year 2000, QAA will expect that individual institutions will be in a position to demonstrate how they are meeting the expectations contained in the precepts of this Code.

This section of the Code of Practice covers quality assurance matters which relate principally to postgraduate research. It does not cover more general matters which are relevant to all students. In view of this, users are advised to have regard to other sections of the QAA Code as they are published and, in the meantime, to the Guidelines on the Quality Assurance of Research Degrees (1996) and the general Guidelines on Quality Assurance (1996), both produced by the Higher Education Quality Council.

General principles



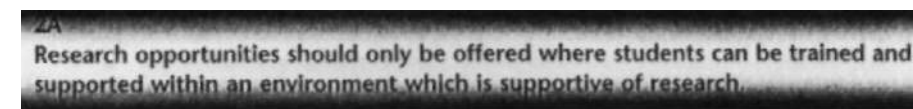
Institutional regulations can usefully cover:

- *information provision;*
- *admission arrangements;*
- *the criteria for registration;*
- *the requirements attaching to particular postgraduate research awards;*
- *the arrangements for progression;*
- *supervision and monitoring arrangements;*
- *the arrangements concerning any study undertaken in collaboration with internal or external agencies;*
- *assessment requirements and examination procedures;*
- *the procedures for dealing with detected instances of plagiarism or fraud;*
- *complaints and appeals mechanisms.*

in communicating their regulations, institutions may wish to take into account the following audiences:

- *those registering as research students;*
- *staff directly involved with supervising research students and monitoring the institution's postgraduate environment;*
- *third parties (for example, sponsoring organisations, research councils and professional and statutory bodies) with an involvement in the research and examination programme.*

The research environment



in considering what constitutes an environment supportive of research achievement, institutions will want to consider:

- *what constitutes a successful community of academic staff and postgraduate students engaged in research;*
- *the quality of supervision available including the research skills of prospective supervisors;*
- *the facilities and equipment that will be made available to research students;*

- *what provision should be made available to develop research and employment-related skills;*
- *access to academic and welfare support facilities;*
- *the opportunities for effective student representation;*
- *what implementation and monitoring mechanisms need to be applied where a project is undertaken in collaboration with another organisation.*

Promotional information

3A
All publicity materials associated with postgraduate research programmes should be clear, accurate and of sufficient detail to inform student choice.

in advertising postgraduate research opportunities, institutions will wish to ensure that advertising material:

- *is accurate and provides information on institutional provision and the expectations and demands (financial and other) that will be placed upon the research student;*
- *includes relevant admissions criteria.*

The selection and admission of students

Admissions procedures should be clear and consistently applied.

4B
Only appropriately qualified and/or prepared students should be admitted onto research programmes.

4C
Admissions decisions should involve the judgment of more than one member of

in considering applications with a view to admission, institutions will wish to consider:

- *how to ensure that suitably experienced and trained staff are used in the selection process;*
- *how interviews with candidates might be used as part of the admissions process*

(including arrangements for assessing the suitability of candidates based overseas);

- *the use, where a prospective student lacks a first degree and/or a taught postgraduate award, of alternative mechanisms for assessing student qualification and preparedness, reflecting professional or other work experience;*
- *the use of references and other information in helping to assess the suitability of a candidate to undertake postgraduate research;*
- *whether the prospective student has, or is likely to secure, the necessary financial support to undertake their studies;*
- *the assurance of language proficiency, particularly where programmes involve work in a language other than the candidate's native language. The definition of minimum proficiency levels and the provision of in-house training should be considered;*
- *the balance of responsibilities between staff in local units and central postgraduate administration;*
- *the maintenance of confidentiality throughout the admissions process.*

4D
Admissions procedures should promote equality of opportunity.

in developing, maintaining and communicating their admissions procedures, institutions will wish to:

- *give appropriate attention to developments in equal opportunity principles and relevant legislative provision;*
- *ensure that an effective support infrastructure exists for those students with special needs.*

Enrolment and registration of research students

5A
The entitlements and responsibilities of a research student undertaking a postgraduate research programme at the institution should be defined and communicated clearly.

The formal offer letter (or other communication medium used by the institution, such as institutional World Wide Web pages) made to successful candidates should address issues such as:

- *the total fees, including any other charges (such as 'bench' fees) which will be levied;*

- a brief outline of the proposed research study programme(s), the normal length of study and the facilities that will be made available to the student;
- the name(s) of the supervisor(s) and supervisory arrangements;
- the requirements which the institution places upon the research student (for example, attendance, progress reports, contact with the supervisor(s)) and arrangements for enrolment and/or registration;
- the institution's research ethics and codes and those of relevant professional bodies and discipline groups;
- health and safety framework and procedures with respect to plagiarism and scientific misconduct;
- what the institution's expectations are of its students in relation to academic and social conduct and performance;
- making it clear that the student has an important responsibility for their academic studies and candidacy for a degree;
- the nature, extent and terms of any teaching or demonstrating duties that might be undertaken by the research student;
- the institution's policies, practices and requirements with respect to the matter of intellectual property rights (including arrangements, where relevant, with external commercial or industrial organisations with their own intellectual property rights arrangements);
- the requirements and conditions of any sponsor.

Student information and induction

Research students should be provided with opportunities by the institution to enable them to commence their studies with an understanding of the academic and social environment within which they will be working.

Institutions will wish to consider how best to organise the structure and timing of induction for all full- and part-time students, for example, through the provision of formal induction programmes, at institutional and/or local level.

Induction, which should normally occur within a short period of enrolment, can usefully include briefing and appropriate documentation on:

- the institution and its postgraduate portfolio;
- the challenges that will typically face research students during the course of their studies and where guidance may be sought in the event of difficulties;

- the institution's registration, enrolment, appeals and complaints procedures, assessment requirements, and research degree regulations;
- the facilities that will be made available to the student and the institution's learning support infrastructure;
- relevant health and safety and other legislative information;
- student welfare;
- supervision arrangements, including evaluation, monitoring and review procedures;
- skills training programmes (both those available and those that may be required);
- the opportunities that exist for meeting other research students and staff;
- the opportunities that exist to develop scholarly competence and independence of mind;
- the opportunities that exist to share experience and understanding beyond a research student's immediate study area.

The approval of research projects

Adequate consideration should be given by the institution (and any sponsor) to the feasibility of both full- and part-time students undertaking and successfully completing a particular research project.

When considering a possible research project to be undertaken by a student, on either a full- or part-time basis, institutions (centrally and at local level) will wish to take into account the following sorts of issues:

- how to establish a clear project proposal and the objectives of the project;
- the relationship between the approval of the research project by academic peers and the admission of the student to the postgraduate programme;
- the suitability of the project within the programme of study and its associated award;
- the skills, knowledge and aptitude required by student and supervisor for successful completion of the project;
- the resources (including staffing and facilities) needed to support the research project and arrangements for monitoring the continued availability of such resources;

- *the practicality of completing the project on time, taking account of any institutional regulations and other stakeholder interests or requirements;*
- *when the project involves extended periods of off-campus field-work or work in collaborating organisations, that there are means of ensuring that, although absent from their principal place of study, research student progress continues to be carefully supported and monitored.*

Skills training

8A
Research students should have access to training sufficient to gain the skills they need to design and complete their programmes effectively and to help prepare themselves for their subsequent career.

in considering the provision of skills training, institutions will wish to consider the development of:

- *a broad understanding of the context in which the research takes place;*
- *analytical and research skills, including the understanding of project design and research methodologies, appropriate to the subject and programme of study;*
- *general and employment-related skills including, for example, interpersonal and team working skills; project management, information retrieval and database management, written and oral presentational skills, career planning and advice and intellectual property rights management;*
- *language support and academic writing skills;*
- *training and support for those researchers who may be involved in teaching and demonstrating activities.*

Supervision

9A
Supervisors should possess recognised subject expertise.

in ensuring that appropriate staff undertake supervisory duties, institutions will wish to ensure that supervisory staff are qualified and recognised by peers in their own subject field.

9B
Supervisors should have the necessary skills and experience to monitor, support and direct research students' work.

Institutions should consider:

- *the provision of training for supervisors and continuing staff development;*
- *whether, if a supervisory team is appointed, one member should be designated as the first point of contact;*
- *what alternative arrangements are necessary and appropriate where the supervisor(s) is unavailable to act for a temporary or extended period.*

9C
Research students should receive support and direction sufficient to enable them to succeed in their studies.

Institutions will wish to consider how to ensure that:

- *individual supervisors are not overloaded;*
- *there is a framework for regular supervisor/research student interaction, with a minimum frequency of (and responsibility for initiating) scheduled review meetings between the student, supervisor(s) and, if appropriate, other individuals;*
- *students are introduced to other researchers (and appropriate academic bodies and societies) in their field;*
- *participation in institutional and external discussion forums is encouraged, with the presentation of research outcomes where relevant;*
- *advice is provided on health and safety, ethical and other issues;*
- *there are routes for the research student and supervisor(s) to seek independent advice should communication links within the relationship break down;*
- *support is provided to the supervisor(s) where serious concerns of student ability or application to the study programme have been identified.*

9D
The progress made by research students should be consistently monitored and regularly communicated to the students.

Institutions will wish to consider:

- *the nature and frequency of contact between the supervisor(s) and research student;*
- *the nature and adequacy of monitoring reports (including their production and agreement, institutional review mechanisms and feedback arrangements);*
- *the mechanisms for advising research students if desired academic standards have not yet been, or are unlikely to be, achieved;*
- *the provision of counselling and advisory s e r v i c e s :*

the transfer arrangements between registration categories;
the mechanisms by which decisions to suspend or terminate a research student registration may be taken.

Assessment

10A
 Postgraduate research assessment processes should be communicated clearly fully to research students and supervisors

Institutions will wish to consider:

- *the form in which postgraduate research assessment regulations and information should be made available to their research students, staff and external examiners drawing attention to any exceptions or additional requirements that apply;*
- *the timing of the provision of such information;*
- *the mechanisms used for communicating deadlines in respect of the submission of research project work;*
- *the mechanisms used for communicating procedures relating to the nominating of examiners, the examination process (including any oral examination), the process and time taken to reach a decision and the potential outcomes of that assessment.*

10B
 Postgraduate research assessment processes should be clear and operated rigorously, fairly, reliably and consistently.

Institutions will wish to consider:

- *the mechanisms used for the identification and maintenance of standards of research student achievement;*
- *procedures for the appointment of at least two examiners of a postgraduate research dissertation or thesis, of whom at least one should be external to the institution;*
- *how to ensure that assessment is undertaken only by those individuals with relevant qualifications and experience and with a clear understanding of the process;*
- *under what circumstances (if at all) a student's supervisor should be an examiner;*
- *the avoidance of appointing as internal or external examiners researchers who have had a substantial direct involvement in the research student's work on which their work is the focus of the research project;*

declarations by students that the material presented for examination is their own work and has not been submitted for any other award (and, where relevant, how it relates to a group project);

communication to the student and any sponsor of assessment outcomes and any consequent procedures.

Feedback, complaints and appeals

11A
 Mechanisms should exist to enable open and constructive feedback to be provided by research students and their supervisors on the learning experience and support infrastructure.

Institutions will wish to consider:

- *the mechanisms used to secure and promulgate feedback;*
- *representation on institutional progress monitoring and decision-making bodies.*

11B
 Complaints and appeals procedures should be fair, open and consistently applied, allowing students access to relevant information and an opportunity to present a case.

in seeking to promote non-confrontational resolution of disputes, institutions will wish to consider how to ensure that their procedures apply equally to all categories of research student, including those who study on a part-time basis, are 'off site', are registered on collaborative programmes or on visiting programmes.

11C
 Independent and formal procedures should exist to deal swiftly with complaints from research students about the quality of the institution's learning and support provision.

Institutions will wish to consider:

- *whether their general institutional complaints procedures are applicable to research students and, if not, whether they need to develop and communicate clearly additional or alternative mechanisms;*
- *the importance of highlighting the need for students to discharge their responsibilities in relation to the pursuance of a formal complaint.*

11D
 Formal procedures should exist to deal with any academic appeals made by postgraduate research students.

Institutions will wish to consider:

- *how to ensure that their appeal procedures are clear and well-publicised and save to protect the rights of all concerned.*

11E
 The acceptable grounds for appeals should be clearly defined.

Institutions will wish to consider:

- *what mechanisms are used to communicate appeals procedures;*
- *Inno students may lodge an appeal;*
- *how decisions are taken to grant an appeal hearing;*
- *the constitution of an appeal panel, and the relation of its members to those involved in the original assessment decision;*
- *how records are maintained of an appeal hearing;*
- *the mechanisms for communicating the results of an appeal hearing to interested parties.*

Evaluation

12A
 The extent to which institutions are discharging their responsibilities for the standards of the research awards granted in their name, and for the quality of the education provided to enable research students to attain those standards, should be regularly reviewed.

Institutions will wish to take into account:

- *the time taken to submit theses and other materials for assessment;*
- *pass and fail rates;*
- *feedback received from research students and employers;*
- *career progression information relating to full- and, where appropriate, part-time research students;*
- *comments received from external examiners;*

- *the extent to which institutional research training programmes meet the standards set for such provision by the institution;*
- *feedback received from research students, employers, sponsors and any other external funders.*

Annex

The Code of Practice for the Assurance of Academic Quality and Standards in Higher Education: Postgraduate Research Programmes

The precepts

(Note: The precepts are printed here without the guidance notes for ease of reference)

General principles

1A

Full- and part-time postgraduate research programmes will only be offered where students can be expected to meet the academic standards the institution has set for itself, which should reflect national expectations.

1B

Regulations should be clearly defined, made readily available and be sufficiently comprehensive to cover the progression of research students from admission and registration through to final examination and award.

1C

Regulations should be subject to regular review, at local and institutional level.

The research environment

2A

Research opportunities should only be offered where students can be trained and supported within an environment which is supportive of research.

Promotional information

3A

All publicity materials associated with postgraduate research programmes should be clear, accurate and of sufficient detail to inform student choice.

The selection and admission of students

4A

Admissions procedures should be clear and consistently applied.

4B

Only appropriately qualified and/or prepared students should be admitted onto research programmes.

4C

Admissions decisions should involve the judgment of more than one member of the institution's staff with relevant expertise.

4D

Admissions procedures should promote equality of opportunity.

Enrolment and registration of research students

5A

The entitlements and responsibilities of a research student undertaking a postgraduate research programme at the institution should be defined and communicated clearly.

Student information and induction

6A

Research students should be provided with opportunities by the institution to enable them to commence their studies with an understanding of the academic and social environment within which they will be working.

The approval of research projects

7A

Adequate consideration should be given by the institution (and any sponsor) to the feasibility of both full- and part-time students undertaking and successfully completing a particular research project.

Skills training

8A

Research students should have access to training sufficient to gain the skills they need to design and complete their programmes effectively and to help prepare themselves for their subsequent career.

Supervision

9A

Supervisors should possess recognised subject expertise.

9B

Supervisors should have the necessary skills and experience to monitor, support and direct research students' work.

9C

Research students should receive support and direction sufficient to enable them to succeed in their studies.

9D

The progress made by research students should be consistently monitored and regularly communicated to the students.

Assessment

10A

Postgraduate research assessment processes should be communicated clearly and fully to research students and supervisors.

10B

Postgraduate research assessment processes should be clear and operated rigorously, fairly, reliably and consistently.

Feedback, complaints and appeals

11A

Mechanisms should exist to enable open and constructive feedback to be provided by research students and their supervisors on the learning experience and support infrastructure

11B

Complaints and appeals procedures should be fair, open and consistently applied, allowing students access to relevant information and an opportunity to present a case.

11C

Independent and formal procedures should exist to deal swiftly with complaints from research students about the quality of the institution's learning and support provision.

11D

Formal procedures should exist to deal with any academic appeals made by postgraduate research students.

11E

The acceptable grounds for appeals should be clearly defined.

Evaluation

12A

The extent to which institutions are discharging their responsibilities for the standards of the research awards granted in their name, and for the quality of the education provided to enable research students to attain those standards, should be regularly reviewed.

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Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality
and standards in higher education

Section 2: Collaborative provision - July 1999

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Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education: Collaborative provision

Foreword

1 This document is a code of practice for collaborative arrangements entered into by UK higher education institutions. It is one of a suite of inter-related documents which, taken together, will form an overall *Code of Practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* for the guidance of higher education institutions subscribing to the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (the QAA).

2 The overall *Code* and its constituent sections are being prepared by the QAA in response both to the reports of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education and its Scottish Committee (the 'Dearing' and 'Garrick' reports) and the consequent remodelling of the national arrangements for quality assurance in higher education. The completed *Code* will identify a comprehensive series of system-wide expectations covering matters relating to the management of academic quality and standards in higher education. In so doing, it will provide an authoritative reference point for institutions as they consciously, actively and systematically assure the academic quality and standards of their programmes, awards and qualifications. The *Code* will assume that, taking into account nationally agreed principles and practices, each institution has its own systems for independent verification both of its quality and standards and of the effectiveness of its quality assurance systems. In developing the *Code*, extensive advice is being sought from a range of knowledgeable practitioners.

3 Each section of the *Code* will be structured into a series of precepts and accompanying outline guidance. The precepts identify those key matters which the QAA expects an institution to be able to demonstrate it is addressing effectively through its own quality assurance mechanisms. The accompanying outline guidance is provided to assist institutions in maintaining and enhancing the quality of provision for students and other stakeholders. The guidance is not intended to be either prescriptive or exhaustive: its purpose is to offer a framework for quality assurance and control which institutions may wish to use directly and adapt according to their own needs, traditions, cultures and decision-making processes. Nonetheless, in many institutions the guidance will constitute appropriate good practice.

4 To assist users, the precepts are listed, without the associated guidance, in appendix 1 to the code.

5 During the course of its quality assurance reviews, the QAA will consider the extent to which individual institutions are meeting the expectations of the precepts in the available sections of the *Code of Practice*. The QAA will report on how effectively higher education institutions individually are meeting these expectations

and are discharging their responsibilities for the academic standards and quality of their programmes and awards. In doing so it will focus on the precepts themselves, and not on the associated guidance: the latter may, however, provide a helpful starting point for discussion. So far as this particular section of the *Code* is concerned, institutions will also be expected to demonstrate that, as they review their existing collaborative relationships, they are identifying any aspects which do not offer the safeguards that the precepts seek to provide and are taking appropriate action to meet any consequent shortcomings. The QAA expects that by autumn 2000 all institutions will be able to demonstrate that they are adhering to the precepts.

Introduction

6 **The Code of Practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education:** Collaborative provision is concerned with the wide range of collaborative or partnership arrangements which higher education institutions enter into with other institutions or organisations, in both the UK and overseas. The code is concerned with collaborative arrangements involving the provision of programmes of study and the granting of awards and qualifications. It does not interpret the word 'collaborative' any more widely. The quality assurance implications of these arrangements are particularly challenging. This code is intended to help institutions to ensure that the quality and standard of the programmes and awards with which they are involved, as awarding institutions, are adequately safeguarded. It is relevant to institutions at all stages of their collaborative activity.

7 The code is based on the key principle that collaborative arrangements, wherever and however organised, should widen learning opportunities without prejudice either to the standard of the award or qualification or the quality of what is offered to the student. Further, the arrangements for assuring the quality and standards should be as rigorous, secure and open to scrutiny as those for programmes provided wholly within the responsibility of a single institution. This remains the case even when a partner organisation is itself also an Awarding Institution, as with joint or dual awards. However, it is recognised that in view of the particular nature of a collaborative arrangement involving two or more UK Awarding Institutions the detailed provisions of the code might not necessarily need to be followed in the course of such arrangements to ensure that the key principles referred to in this paragraph are observed.

8 Most of the precepts and the accompanying guidance in this code are relevant to any form of collaborative provision. It is clearly indicated where precepts or guidance are appropriate for particular forms of arrangement only. In cases where the award which is the subject of a collaborative arrangement is that of a body other than the awarding institution, and/or is granted under licence, such as for some professional or statutory bodies, it still remains good practice to apply the provisions in the code. Particular care will need to be taken to ensure that the requirements of any professional or statutory body with an interest in a programme which is the subject of a collaborative arrangement are satisfied. The code does not address the particular requirements of distance learning provision: a separate document has been prepared for this*. Nor is it concerned with credit-rating outcomes, which will be dealt with in a separate section of the *Code of Practice*.

9 The QAA believes that adherence to the precepts of this code cannot be demonstrated where 'serial franchising' takes place, (ie where an institution franchises provision to, or validates the provision of, another, which in turn franchises the provision elsewhere).

10 There is a reasonable expectation that the holder of an award from a UK institution will have been taught and assessed in the English language* unless the subject of the degree is such that it is obvious that all or part of the teaching and assessment would have been in another language. Given this reasonable expectation, awarding institutions should be cautious about entering into arrangements whereby assessments will be in a language other than English. Precept 33 in the code details the information which should be included on a certificate and/or transcript when assessment is not in English. An institution should ensure before entering into a collaborative arrangement with an institution based overseas that it can satisfy the provisions of the code and operate within the legislative and cultural requirements of the country in which the arrangement might be effective. Where a change in legislation means that it is not possible for an existing arrangement to continue to fulfil both of these requirements, the QAA would not expect an institution to operate unlawfully. It would, however, expect the institution to consider the future of the arrangement.

11 Preparation of the code has taken account of the experience of institutions that have been involved with collaborative arrangements. It has also benefited from codes and guidance produced by other bodies, particularly the former Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC) and the Council of Validating Universities (CVU). The QAA is especially grateful to the CVU and its members for the extensive assistance and co-operation they have provided.

12 This code covers matters which are specific to collaborative arrangements. Such arrangements must also, of course, have regard to the quality assurance principles which are common to all types of provision, whether collaborative or not.

Glossary of terms

The vocabulary of collaborative provision includes many words which are used in different ways by different institutions. This is a source of both actual and potential confusion. While the QAA does not wish to prescribe any particular usage, it is important that readers of this code should be aware of the way in which words are being used in it. To this end, the following glossary of terms is provided:

Accreditation is used within this code to describe a process by which an institution without its own degree awarding powers, or which chooses not to use its awarding powers, is given wide authority by a university or other awarding institution to exercise powers and responsibility for academic provision. The awarding institution exercises only limited control over the quality assurance functions, but remains ultimately responsible for the quality and standard of the award.

Accreditation of Prior (Experiential) Learning (AP(E)L) is a process by which individuals can claim and gain credit towards qualifications based on their prior learning and, sometimes, experience. Credit should only be given where there is evidence that the experience or learning has resulted in the student achieving the appropriate and clearly expressed learning outcomes.

* *Guidelines on the quality assurance of distance learning*, QAA, 1999.

Agent is used in this code to describe a third party employed by the Awarding Institution to fulfil certain functions in order to facilitate a collaborative arrangement. An agent is not normally directly involved with the delivery of the programme.

Articulation is used in this code to describe a particular form of formal credit-rating and transfer agreement between two institutions, one of which agrees to recognise and grant specific credit and advanced standing to applicants from a named programme of study pursued in the other. This code of practice does not attempt to deal with the detailed quality assurance aspects of articulation: these will be dealt with in another section of the *Code*, on credit-rating. The code is, however, relevant to some of the institutional relationship aspects of articulation.

Award is used in this code to denote a degree, diploma, certificate or other similar formal mark of recognition of successful completion of a programme of study. Some awards also qualify their holders in more specific ways: for example, a degree may permit or facilitate entry to a particular vocation or profession, or exempt the holder from part or all of a professional examination. In these circumstances an award may also be a qualification. Recently, qualification has become widely used in some educational contexts, particularly in the international sphere, as a synonym for award.

Awarding Institution means a university or other higher education institution empowered to award degrees, diplomas, certificates, or credits by virtue of authority given to it by statute, Royal Charter or the Privy Council or under licence from another body. (The DfEE publishes official lists of those UK universities and colleges which have their own degree-awarding powers and also of those colleges which offer courses leading to the degrees of other institutions.)

Benchmark information is a term used in this code to define explicit national statements of academic standards or outcomes for individual subjects. Benchmark information of this type provides a reference point against which outcomes can be measured. The QAA is developing 'benchmarks' of this sort in respect of a number of subject groupings as part of its national quality assurance process.

Distance learning describes a wide range of learning activities which are distinguished from institution-centred modes of learning because they involve some degree of physical separation of the student (the learner) from the teacher.

Dual award and joint award describe collaborative arrangements under which two or more awarding institutions together provide programmes leading to separate awards of both, or all, of them (dual award) or to a single award made jointly by both, or all, participants (joint award). The full provisions of this code may not be appropriate for all such arrangements, although the key principle that the standard of an award and the quality of the learning opportunity should not be prejudiced by any collaborative arrangement, should be respected.

Franchising is the process by which an Awarding Institution agrees to authorise the provision of the whole or part of one or more of its own approved programmes, by a Partner Organisation. In doing so, the Awarding Institution retains overall responsibility for the programme's content, delivery, assessment and quality assurance arrangements.

Level is a broad indicator of the relative demand, complexity, depth of study and autonomy of learning.

Level descriptor is a statement that provides a broad indication of learning appropriate to attainment at a particular level, designed to support the assignment of specified learning outcomes to particular modules.

Partner Organisation is the term used in the code to describe the institution or other body with which the Awarding Institution enters into an agreement to collaborate. The Partner Organisation will normally be an institution or body which does not have degree awarding powers, but may, on occasion, be another Awarding Institution. The terms partner and partnership are not, in this code, used with their narrower legal definition.

Programme is the academic provision which is the subject of the collaboration. The provision may be at the level of a named award or parts of an award.

Programme specification provides a concise statement about the intended learning outcomes from a particular programme, information about the teaching, learning and assessment methods used to enable the learning outcomes to be achieved and demonstrated, and shows how the modules and units of study which make up a programme will relate to levels of achievement recognised in the qualifications frameworks.

Professional and statutory bodies is used in the code to denote organisations which approve or recognise specific programmes in the context of the requirements for professional qualification. Some such organisations have a prescribed statutory responsibility to approve or recognise programmes and/or to determine the academic standards and professional or vocational components of such programmes.

Qualifications frameworks describe the structures being developed by QAA within which it is intended that all UK higher education qualifications and awards should be located.

Quality assurance is the means through which an institution confirms that the conditions are in place for students to achieve the standards set by the institution or other awarding body.

Validation in respect of collaborative provision describes the process by which an Awarding Institution judges that a programme developed and delivered by another institution or organisation is of an appropriate quality and standard to lead to its award. In the particular case of accreditation the process of validation may be

delegated to the Partner Organisation although, the Awarding Institution retains ultimate responsibility for the quality and standards of awards. A validated programme will normally, but not invariably, be in a subject which the Awarding Institution itself offers. The Awarding Institution will determine the extent to which it exercises direct control over the quality assurance aspects of the programme's management.

Note:

Reference in this code to programmes taught and/or assessed in the English language (Introduction, paragraph 10; and precept 33) should be taken also to include programmes provided and assessed by Welsh institutions in the Welsh language.

Precepts and guidance

(The precepts are contained in the grey boxes: see paragraphs 3 and 4 of the Foreword.)

Responsibility for, and equivalence of, academic standards

1

The Awarding Institution is responsible for the academic standards of all awards granted in its name.

2

The academic standards of all awards made under a collaborative arrangement must be both equivalent to those of comparable awards for programmes delivered by an Awarding Institution itself and be compatible with any relevant benchmark information recognised within the UK.

These principles should underpin all of an Awarding Institution's activities and considerations in connection with collaborative arrangements. In particular, in order to demonstrate equivalence an Awarding Institution should consider the need to:

- ensure that the academic standards of all its programmes, however delivered, are clearly expressed and communicated to all involved with, and studying on, a programme, for example by the preparation and dissemination of a programme specification;
- review regularly the extent to which programmes have achieved their intended objectives;
- provide evidence of the comparability between student attainment on programmes provided under the collaborative arrangement and student attainment on any equivalent programmes delivered by the Awarding Institution;
- provide evidence of the extent to which student attainment matches any applicable subject benchmark standards and/or level descriptors in the UK qualifications frameworks (when these are implemented).

Policies, procedures and information

3

Collaborative arrangements should be negotiated, agreed and managed in accordance with formally stated policies and procedures of the Awarding Institution.

4

The Awarding Institution's policies on collaborative arrangements should include a requirement that the commitment and support of both the Awarding Institution's and the Partner Organisation's central authorities must underpin any arrangement.

5

An up to date, authoritative and easily accessible register of all approved collaborative arrangements should be maintained within the Awarding Institution.

6

The Awarding Institution should inform any professional or statutory body which has approved or recognised a programme which is the subject of a possible or actual collaborative arrangement of its proposals and of any final agreements which involve the programme.

An Awarding Institution should consider including in its policies and procedures on collaborative arrangements:

- a requirement to define all collaborative arrangements in relation to its mission and strategic plan;
- a requirement to consider any individual proposal for a new collaborative arrangement in the context of the its existing collaborative arrangements and other commitments;
- procedures for establishing new collaborative arrangements;
- a template for agreements;
- provisions to ensure that its responsibilities for standards and quality are fulfilled;
- requirements for continuing management of the arrangement, including specified reporting channels;
- the means by which its central authorities will receive information about, and review, the operation of the arrangement;
- procedures to monitor and review regularly the programmes delivered under the arrangement.

An Awarding Institution should consider including for each record in the register of all approved collaborative arrangements at least:

- the name, address and nature of the Partner Organisation;
- the date of the formal agreement or contract, and the dates on which it is to be reviewed and it will end;
- the nature of the collaboration, the programmes and awards involved, and the numbers of students;
- the numbers of students permitted to be registered, actually registered and who have received an award under the arrangement;
- the details of the individuals within both the Awarding Institution and the Partner Organisation who have designated responsibility to oversee the arrangement;
- the languages of instruction and assessment used in each programme.

7

The Awarding Institution's policies and procedures should ensure that the financial aspects of the arrangement satisfy any statutory and funding body requirements; activities must be costed and accounted for accurately and fully. There should be adequate safeguards against financial temptations to compromise academic standards.

An Awarding Institution should consider the inclusion in its policies and procedures of provisions:

- to record and account for all transactions made in connection with the arrangement for the transfer of funds between the Awarding Institution and the Partner Organisation;
- to identify and respond to significant changes in the financial and other resource aspects of the arrangement in a way that will ensure that academic standards will not be compromised and the interests of students will be protected.

in addition to the above, Awarding Institutions undertaking arrangements with overseas Partner Organisations should consider the need for policies and procedures for:

- dealing with currency fluctuations, including obligations to students adversely affected by changes in the economic environment;
- the authorisation of travel and subsistence arrangements for staff.

Selecting a partner organisation

8

An Awarding Institution should be able to explain the rationale for its choice of Partner Organisations.

9

An Awarding Institution should satisfy itself about the good standing and financial stability of a prospective Partner Organisation. The mission and objectives of a Partner Organisation should be compatible with those of the Awarding Institution.

10

The legal status of the prospective Partner Organisation and its capacity to contract with the Awarding Institution should be examined, together with its ability to provide the infrastructure and the learning resources necessary to ensure that the required quality and standard of the planned provision will be **achieved**.

11

Where a prospective Partner Organisation is known to have a current, or has had a previous, relationship with another UK Awarding Institution, enquiries should be made of that Awarding Institution as to the standing and effectiveness of the proposed Partner Organisation.

12

Where an Awarding Institution has withdrawn from an arrangement with a Partner Organisation it should, to the extent permitted by law and the contract(s) entered into with such a Partner Organisation, and in the event that enquiries are made from another UK Awarding Institution proposing to enter into a collaborative arrangement with the same Partner Organisation, make a frank disclosure to that UK Awarding Institution of any concerns which led to its withdrawal.

in satisfying itself about its choice of a Partner Organisation, an Awarding Institution should consider seeking information from:

- the mission statement, strategic plan, prospectus, organisational structure, arrangements for the assurance of quality and standards and relevant accounts of the prospective Partner Organisation;
- reports from funding or external quality assurance bodies;
- business plans, bankers' references and published accounts;
- reports of visits by the Awarding Institution's staff and its representatives to the prospective Partner Organisation.

An Awarding Institution exploring a potential arrangement with an **overseas Partner Organisation** should also consider seeking:

- information available from government offices and agencies of the country in which the Partner Organisation is based;
- information available from the British Council and the United Kingdom National Academic Recognition Information Centre (UK NARIC);
- information available from UK Government offices based in the country;
- advice on the cultural, legal, financial and political environment in which the prospective Partner Organisation operates and the potential effect of this environment on the Awarding Institution's ability to exercise its responsibilities under the planned agreement, particularly for academic standards and quality;
- advice on the implications of language issues.

Written agreements

13

There should be written and legally binding agreements or contracts setting out the rights and obligations of the parties and signed by the heads of the Awarding Institution and the Partner Organisation. The written agreements or contracts should at least cover:

- i) the aspects of the arrangement concerned with the relationship of the Awarding Institution with the Partner Organisation, and
- ii) the aspects of the arrangement relating to individual programmes.

14

The agreements should include termination and arbitration provisions and financial arrangements and should describe the respective responsibilities of the contracting parties for academic standards and quality. They should include provisions to enable the Awarding Institution to suspend or withdraw from the agreement if the Partner Organisation fails to fulfil its obligations. The residual obligations to students on termination of the agreement should also be covered in the agreement or contract. Unreasonable confidentiality provisions which would preclude the Awarding Institution from sharing with other Awarding Institutions any concerns which led to its withdrawal from the agreement should be avoided.

in its agreement or contract addressing the relationship with the Partner Organisation the Awarding Institution should consider the inclusion of provisions relating to:

- the respective responsibilities and obligations of each of the parties, including the delivery of programmes;
- the provision of regular and sufficient information to enable the Awarding Institution to be confident that the responsibilities of the parties are being met;
- quality assurance arrangements;
- reporting and communication requirements, including feedback from the Awarding Institution to the Partner Organisation;
- the duration of the agreement and review arrangements;
- intellectual property considerations;
- publicity and promotional material;
- the maintenance of student and other designated records by the Partner Organisation during the course of the agreement, following the termination of the agreement, and in the event that the Partner Organisation ceases to exist;
- obligations on the Partner Organisation to provide to the Awarding Institution, on request, appropriate information about the conduct of the programme including staff and student matters;
- responsibilities for the enrolment and registration of students;
- responsibilities relating to student discipline, complaints and appeals;
- responsibilities for the issue and secure control of award certificates ;
- responsibilities for the issue of transcripts.

in its agreement or contract for a particular programme an Awarding Institution should consider the inclusion of provisions relating to:

- the assessment of students;
- the appointment and role of external examiners;
- respective responsibilities where shared teaching is a feature of the arrangement;
- the number of students permitted to be recruited onto a programme;
- responsibilities for the recruitment and selection of students;
- articulation arrangements.

in addition to the above an Awarding Institution should consider, in agreements or contracts with overseas Partner Organisations, the inclusion of provisions relating to:

- the legal jurisdiction under which disputes will be resolved;
- the languages of assessment and instruction;
- responsibilities for the authoritative translation of documents into appropriate languages including the quality assurance of translations.

Selecting an agent

15

An Awarding Institution using agents to broker or facilitate collaborative arrangements must be satisfied that an agent's interests do not conflict with those of either the Awarding Institution or the students recruited to join the programmes provided under the collaborative arrangement.

16

The legal status of the agent, its financial standing and reputation within the local educational community should be investigated fully by the Awarding Institution.

When selecting an agent for collaborative arrangements involving overseas Partner Organisations, Awarding Institutions should consider seeking:

- information available from local government offices and agencies;
- information from UK Government offices based in the country;
- advice on the cultural, legal, financial and political environment in which the agent operates;
- information on the agent's experience and understanding of UK higher education.

Agreements with agents

17

There should be written and legally binding agreements or contracts with any agents involved with collaborative arrangements. Agreements should define the role, responsibilities and delegated powers of the agent in each arrangement. The agreements should include monitoring, arbitration and termination provisions and financial arrangements and specify the legal jurisdiction under which any disputes would be resolved.

When preparing an agreement with an agent the Awarding Institution should consider including statements covering:

- the duties and responsibilities of the parties;
- responsibilities for the production and distribution of appropriate publicity and advertising material;
- monitoring and review arrangements to ensure the obligations are fulfilled appropriately;
- translation arrangements when the language in which the agent would normally operate is not English.

Assuring academic standards and the quality of programmes and awards

18

The Awarding Institution will be accountable for the quality and standard of all programmes and awards offered or made in its name which are provided under collaborative arrangements.

19

Procedures and decisions concerning all programmes, whether for accreditation, validation, articulation or franchising, must be based on specific criteria which are systematic and open to scrutiny.

An Awarding Institution should consider including in the criteria to be applied when making decisions about a prospective Partner Organisation factors relating to the following:

- a written submission from the prospective Partner Organisation, possibly including a self appraisal, providing evidence of its procedures and processes in **operation**;
- the robustness and reliability of the quality assurance and control procedures at programme and organisational levels, and an ability to meet the specific regulatory requirements of the Awarding Institution;
- evidence of sound quality management at all levels;
- the adequacy of administrative support and maintenance for the quality assurance arrangements at programme and organisation levels;
- regulations and procedures governing the relationship of students with the Partner Organisation, including academic support and guidance and provision for meeting students' wider educational needs;
- provision of learning support and infrastructure at a level and quality to meet the requirements of the Awarding Institution for programmes leading to its award;
- appropriate provision for staff appointment, induction and development, to meet the requirements of the Awarding Institution for programmes leading to its awards;
- the particular measures that should be taken when it is known that another institution has previously withdrawn from an arrangement with the prospective Partner Organisation.

For arrangements involving an **overseas Partner Organisation** the Awarding Institution should consider the need for evidence of:

- an understanding of the current practices and expectations of UK higher education, for example in connection with external examining, assessment arrangements and quality assurance requirements;

- a capacity to address appropriately differences in culture and expectations between the respective higher education systems in a way that will ensure that the requirements of the arrangement can be fulfilled;
- a capacity to provide translation facilities of an appropriate standard if the languages of instruction and assessment are not to be English.

For arrangements within the UK or involving an **overseas Partner Organisation**, an Awarding Institution should consider whether its criteria for approval of programmes should require:

- evidence of experience of the prospective Partner Organisation in delivering comparable programmes at a similar level;
- consideration of the proposed programme by a panel of senior and experienced representatives of the Awarding Institution and external experts and including individuals not previously involved with the planning, development or promotion of the proposed programme;
- reference by the panel considering the proposal to any self appraisal and to internal and external reports bearing on the operation of the prospective Partner Organisation's quality assurance arrangements;
- a visit to review the relevant facilities of the prospective Partner Organisation;
- a final meeting to review the proposal;
- additional investigation where the programme which is the subject of a possible agreement was previously the subject of an arrangement between the Partner Organisation and another Awarding Institution and from which the latter withdrew;
- additional investigation where the programme which is the subject of a possible agreement is in a subject area different from those which have already been approved in the Partner Organisation.

20

The respective responsibilities of the Awarding Institution and the Partner Organisation for quality assurance and control should be clear, explicit and documented.

21

The Awarding Institution should be able to demonstrate that the quality of the programmes provided through the partnership is appropriate to meet the aims and objectives of those programmes and comparable to the quality of any similar programmes provided by the Awarding Institution itself.

The Awarding Institution should consider the need to satisfy itself that:

- there is clarity on how its own quality assurance procedures are applied to the collaborative provision;
- there is adequate monitoring, including regular visits by staff from the Awarding Institution, to verify the accessibility and appropriateness of learning facilities and other support services;
- reliable and timely information is provided by the Partner Organisation on the operation and management of the collaborative programme, including the quality control systems used and the information derived from them;
- effective mechanisms are in place to seek and consider student feedback;
- there is sufficient contact between the academic and administrative staff of the Awarding Institution and the Partner Organisation to sustain an effective partnership and facilitate staff development;
- opportunities for cross-membership of the Awarding Institution's and the Partner Organisation's staff on relevant committees have been explored and, where appropriate, implemented.

22

The Awarding Institution should ensure that effective measures exist to review the proficiency of staff engaged with collaborative programmes.

The Awarding Institution should consider:

- encouraging the Partner Organisation to use an appropriate appraisal mechanism for its staff;
- requiring detailed, verified and regularly updated information about the qualifications and experience of all staff involved in a programme;
- undertaking its own evaluation of the proficiency of the academic staff involved in a programme and provide development opportunities for such staff;
- providing development opportunities for staff engaged with collaborative programmes.

23

The Awarding Institution must determine the admission requirements and acceptable entry qualifications for students joining a programme provided under the collaborative agreement. It should monitor the application of the requirements, paying due regard to the expectations set out by any professional and statutory bodies where appropriate. Particular care needs to be taken with any arrangements for the Accreditation of Prior (Experiential) Learning (AP(E)L) that may be in place. The Awarding Institution should review information on student progression.

The Awarding Institution should consider including in its procedures for approving and monitoring entry requirements arrangements for:

- the Partner Organisation to ensure that the Awarding Institution has details of the entry qualifications of all entrants to a programme;
- the Awarding Institution to monitor the entry qualifications of students against the agreed criteria;
- the Partner Organisation to inform the Awarding Institution of all cases of withdrawal or non progression arising within each cohort of students;
- the Awarding Institution to maintain up to date information on student progression and achievement;
- establishing the equivalence of any non-UK qualifications or other entry qualifications which are likely to be routinely accepted for entry onto the programme;
- ensuring that where credit is given for prior learning there is demonstrable evidence that the required learning outcomes have been achieved.

Assessment requirements

24

The examination and assessment requirements for programmes provided under a collaborative arrangement must be devised so as to ensure that the academic standards of the awards are equivalent to those of the same or comparable programmes delivered by the Awarding Institution and, as such, reflect any national benchmarks.

For franchised programmes the examination and other assessment requirements should be the same as those required by the Awarding Institution when it delivers the same or comparable programmes itself. If variations are essential these must only be made with the prior approval of the Awarding Institution which must be able to demonstrate that academic standards will not be compromised as a result.

For programmes delivered under an accreditation or validation arrangement the examination and assessment requirements should be equivalent to, and as effective as, those employed by the Awarding Institution when it delivers the same or comparable programmes itself.

To ensure that the Awarding Institution's responsibility for the standards of all awards made in its name can be fulfilled satisfactorily, the Awarding Institution should consider the need to:

- confirm that the staff of the Partner Organisation understand the Awarding Institution's approach to examinations and assessments;

- understand the examination and assessment philosophy of the Partner Organisation in order that any differences in approach which might compromise the exercise of the Awarding Institution's responsibility for academic standards can be identified and addressed;
- approve the examination and assessment arrangements, including examination papers and marking arrangements, in accordance with any provisions in the written agreement;
- use a common assessment panel or examination board, where possible, or ensure a close comparability of approach, for example by some common membership.

An Awarding Institution should also consider the need to confirm that academic and senior administrative staff of the Partner Organisation:

- understand the Awarding Institution's approach to examinations and assessments;
- ensure that the examination and assessment arrangements fulfil any provisions in the written agreement.

in addition to the above, where an overseas Partner Organisation is involved, the Awarding Institution should consider whether it is necessary to make special provision to ensure:

- it is able to exercise effectively its responsibility for academic standards when assessments are conducted in a language other than English;
- the competence and independence of translators involved with assessments if in a language other than English.

25

The Awarding Institution should ensure that the Partner Organisation understands and follows the Institution's requirements for the conduct of assessments.

The Awarding Institution should consider the need to introduce the following measures:

- an agreed convention or protocol on invigilation procedures;
- a requirement that members of the Partner Organisation's staff attend appropriate training events or observe the conduct of assessments undertaken by the Awarding Institution;
- a requirement on the Partner Organisation to report regularly on the conduct of assessments;
- procedures to ensure that students undertaking an examination or assessment are the same as those recorded as having completed that examination or assessment;

- regular attendance, pre-arranged or unannounced, at assessment events organised by the Partner Organisation by an appropriate member of the Awarding Institution's staff, or an external examiner, to monitor the conduct of assessment;
- procedures to ensure the security of examination papers;
- requirements for the retention of examination scripts for an appropriate period.

External examining*

26

External examining procedures for programmes offered by a Partner Organisation should be the same as, or demonstrably equivalent to, those used by the Awarding Institution for its own internal programmes. The procedures should be clearly specified and documented, and rigorously and consistently applied.

27

The Awarding Institution should have specific policies and procedures on the recruitment and selection of external examiners for programmes provided under a collaborative arrangement. These should reflect the Awarding Institution's normal approach to the recruitment and selection of external examiners and be clear, explicit and communicated to the Partner Organisation.

28

The Awarding Institution must retain responsibility for the appointment and functions of external examiners.

An Awarding Institution should consider the need to include in its procedures and policies provisions to address:

- the receipt and consideration of nominations from the Partner Organisation;
- the experience and expertise required of external examiners;
- the independence of external examiners from the Awarding Institution and the Partner Organisation;
- the feasibility of appointing external examiners already engaged by the Awarding Institution for programmes that it provides itself;
- the requirements of external accrediting bodies;
- potential conflicts of interest.

* Reference should be made also to the code of practice on external examining, due for publication in January 2000.

in addition to the above, for arrangements involving an overseas Partner Organisation an Awarding Institution should consider whether provisions need to be in place to address:

- the necessary language skills of external examiners where instruction and/or assessment is not in English;
- the experience and understanding of UK higher education, including the role of external examiners, of individuals nominated to act as external examiners;
- the desirability of appointing additional external examiners to assist with the monitoring of the provision and to ensure an appropriate range of skills, expertise and experience.

29

The role of external examiners in ensuring that the Awarding Institution can fulfil its responsibility for the academic standards of the awards made in its name must be clearly defined and communicated to the Partner Organisation and to the individual external examiners.

Awarding Institutions should consider the need to define the roles of external examiners in the following areas:

- the review, evaluation and moderation of examination and other assessment instruments and practices at each stage of the programme;
- the calibration of academic standards;
- membership of, and a requirement to attend, examination boards or assessment panels;
- influencing or approving the assessment instruments to be used;
- approval of the results list;
- notification to the Awarding Institution of any procedural or other irregularities;
- and as otherwise indicated in relevant sections of the *QAA Code of Practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*.

30

The respective obligations and responsibilities of the Partner Organisation and the Awarding Institution, and the external examiners, should be appropriately and clearly communicated by the Awarding Institution.

The Awarding Institution should consider the need to define:

- responsibilities for the issuing of contracts to, and the payment of, external examiners;

- obligations on the parties to notify the Awarding Institution of changes to an external examiner's circumstances which might affect his or her ability to fulfil the role effectively and impartially;
- the external examiners' reporting requirements;
- the provision of, and attendance at, training and briefing events;
- the respective responsibilities of the Awarding Institution and of the external examiners If problems or concerns are identified by an external examiner.

31

External examiners must receive briefing material and guidance from the Awarding Institution sufficient for them to fulfil their role effectively. they should be expected to participate in induction or training events provided by either the Awarding Institution or the Partner Organisation.

The Awarding Institution should consider the need for external examiners to receive training and/or materials concerning:

- the role of external examiners in UK higher education;
- programme specifications;
- any appropriate benchmark information;
- the requirements of professional and statutory bodies;
- the format and content of the report required;
- the nature of the collaborative arrangement.

Certificates and transcripts

32

The issuing of award certificates and transcripts should remain under the control of the Awarding Institution.

When determining its procedures to ensure that award certificates and transcripts are issued only to those who have satisfied the assessment and examination requirements, the Awarding Institution should consider the need to include provisions for:

- controlled printing and storage arrangements which ensure that only designated individuals can have access to, and can issue, certificates;
- maintenance of proper records in respect of the issue of certificates and transcripts;
- a requirement to undertake appropriate enquiries and checks prior to the issue of a duplicate certificate or transcript;

- specific approval and regular formal audit by the Awarding Institution of the Partner Organisation's arrangements for the distribution of certificates and transcripts, where this activity is delegated.

33

Subject to any overriding statutory or legal requirements or constraints in any relevant jurisdiction, the certificate or transcript should record the name of the Partner Organisation and the language of instruction where this was not English. If the language of assessment was not the same as that used for the Instruction this should also be clearly recorded on the certificate or transcript. Where the information is recorded on the transcript only, the certificate must refer to the existence of the transcript.

34

The words and terms used on the certificate should be consistent both with those used by the Awarding Institution on the certificates for the same or comparable programmes it provides and with any relevant qualifications or awards frameworks.

When determining what information should appear on the certificate and transcript an Awarding Institution should consider the need for:

- confidence that the award certificate will not mislead students, current or prospective employers or other authorities about the nature, standard and level of the award;
- the award certificate or transcript to reflect accurately the nature of the programme.

Information for students

35

Information given by the Partner Organisation, or an agent, to prospective students and to those registered on a programme, about the nature of the programme, the academic standards to be met and the quality of the provision which is offered should be approved by the Awarding Institution, define clearly the nature of the collaborative arrangement and outline the respective responsibilities of the parties.

36

The information should be comparable with that given by the Awarding Institution to its own potential and registered internal students. The information should be monitored regularly and updated as appropriate.

37

The information should include directions to students about the appropriate channels for particular concerns, complaints and appeals.

When approving the information to be given to students the Awarding Institution should consider the need for:

- details of the intended outcomes of the programme;
- information on admission and qualification requirements and any assumed experience or necessary access to particular learning resources;
- information about the time commitments required for study on the programme;
- details of the assessment methods and conditions that will be used;
- guidance to assist students who might transfer to study at the Awarding Institution;
- information on the opportunities for students to use the Awarding Institution's learning and other resources;
- information about fees and incidental expenses and how and when these are to be paid;
- details about welfare, guidance and support services available;
- information about the status of the student within the Awarding Institution and the entitlements that such status does or does not confer;
- a clear statement about the nature of the relevant award and the information which a successful candidate would expect to have recorded on the award certificate and transcript;
- named contacts at the Awarding Institution and the Partner Organisation;
- information about complaints, grievance and appeals procedures and how to make use of these.

in addition to the above, for arrangements involving overseas Partner Organisations or intended specifically for overseas students, an Awarding Institution should consider the need for students to be given:

- details of the languages of instruction and assessment;
- accurate and clear information about the recognition of the programme or award in other countries or by professional and statutory bodies in the UK or elsewhere;
- information about the features of studying in different countries, including information about costs.

Publicity and marketing

38

Effective control over the accuracy of all public information, publicity and promotional activity relating to the programmes and awards for which it has responsibility should be retained by the Awarding Institution, and particularly so where the information is published on its behalf. The Awarding Institution should satisfy itself through active means that this control is exercised consistently and fairly and that the public cannot be misled about the collaborative arrangement or about the nature and standing of the programmes and awards provided under the arrangement.

When exercising this control the Awarding Institution should consider the need to ensure that:

- inappropriate or misleading comparisons with other programmes or providers are avoided;
- derogatory statements about other institutions or organisations are not used;
- there are no misleading statements about the recognition of the awards by public or other authorised bodies;
- there are no misleading statements about entry requirements, credit for prior learning or the length of time that may be required to secure an award;
- where there is a possibility that questions might arise about the recognition of an award or a programme by a professional or statutory body, or within another country, prospective students are alerted to this possibility;
- the reputation for standards and quality of UK higher education is protected.

Appendix I

The precepts

(Note: The precepts are printed here without the guidance notes for ease of reference.)

Responsibility for, and equivalence of, academic standards

1

The Awarding Institution is responsible for the academic standards of **all awards** granted in its name.

2

The academic standards of all awards made under a collaborative arrangement must be both equivalent to those of comparable awards for programmes delivered by an Awarding Institution itself and, as such, be compatible with any relevant benchmark information recognised within the UK.

Policies, procedures and information

3

Collaborative arrangements should be negotiated, agreed and managed in accordance with formally stated policies and procedures of the Awarding Institution.

4

The Awarding Institution's policies on collaborative arrangements should include a requirement that the commitment and support of both the Awarding Institution's and the Partner Organisation's central authorities must underpin any arrangement.

5

An up to date, authoritative and easily accessible register of all approved collaborative arrangements should be maintained within the Awarding Institution.

6

The Awarding Institution should inform any professional or statutory body which has approved or recognised a programme which is the subject of a possible or actual collaborative arrangement of its proposals and of any final agreements which involve the programme.

7

The Awarding Institution's policies and procedures should ensure that the financial aspects of the arrangement satisfy any statutory and funding body requirements; activities must be costed and accounted for accurately and fully. There should be adequate safeguards against financial temptations to compromise academic standards.

Selecting a partner organisation

8

An Awarding Institution should be able to explain the rationale for its choice of Partner Organisations.

9

An Awarding Institution should satisfy itself about the good standing and financial stability of a prospective Partner Organisation. The mission and objectives of a Partner Organisation should be compatible with those of the Awarding Institution.

10

The legal status of the prospective Partner Organisation and its capacity to contract with the Awarding Institution should be examined, together with its ability to provide the infrastructure and the learning resources necessary to ensure that the required quality and standard of the planned provision will be achieved.

11

Where a prospective Partner Organisation is known to have a current, or has had a previous, relationship with another UK Awarding Institution, enquiries should be made of that Awarding Institution as to the standing and effectiveness of the proposed Partner Organisation.

12

Where a UK Awarding Institution has withdrawn from an arrangement with a Partner Organisation it should to the extent permitted by law and the contract(s) signed with such Partner Organisation make a frank disclosure of any concerns which led to its withdrawal in the event that enquiries are made from another UK Awarding Institution proposing to enter into a collaborative arrangement with the same Partner Organisation.

Written agreements

13

There should be written and legally binding agreements or contracts setting out the rights and obligations of the parties and signed by the heads of the Awarding Institution and the Partner Organisation. There should be separate written agreements or contracts to address:

- i) the aspects of the arrangement concerned with the relationship of the Awarding Institution with the Partner Organisation, and
- ii) the aspects of the arrangement relating to individual programmes.

14

The agreements should include termination and arbitration provisions and financial arrangements and should describe the respective responsibilities of the contracting parties for academic standards and quality. They should include provisions to enable the Awarding Institution to suspend or withdraw from the agreement if the Partner Organisation fails to fulfil its obligations. The residual obligations to students on termination of the agreement should also be covered in the agreement or contract.

Selecting an agent

15

An Awarding Institution using agents to broker or facilitate collaborative arrangements must be satisfied that an agent's interests do not conflict with those of either the Awarding Institution or the students recruited to join the programmes provided under the collaborative arrangement.

16

The legal status of the agent, its financial standing and reputation within the local educational community, should be considered by the Awarding Institution.

Agreements with agents

17

There should be written and legally binding agreements or contracts with any agents involved with collaborative arrangements. Agreements should define the role, responsibilities and delegated powers of the agent in each arrangement. The agreements should include monitoring, arbitration and termination provisions and financial arrangements and specify the legal jurisdiction under which any disputes would be resolved.

Assuring academic standards and the quality of programmes and awards

18

The Awarding Institution will be accountable for the quality and standard of all programmes and awards offered or made in its name which are provided under the collaborative arrangements.

19

Procedures and decisions concerning all programmes, whether for accreditation, validation, articulation of franchising, must be based on specific criteria which are systematic and open to scrutiny.

20

The respective responsibilities of the Awarding Institution and the Partner Organisation for quality assurance and control should be clear, explicit and documented.

21

The Awarding Institution should be able to demonstrate that the quality of the programmes provided through the partnership is appropriate to meet the aims and objectives of those programmes and comparable to the quality of any similar programmes provided by the Awarding Institution itself.

22

The Awarding Institution should ensure that effective measures exist to review the proficiency of staff engaged with collaborative programmes.

23

The Awarding Institution must determine the admission requirements and acceptable entry qualifications for students joining a programme provided under the collaborative agreement. It should monitor the application of the requirements, paying due regard to the expectations set out by any professional and statutory bodies where appropriate. Particular care needs to be taken with any arrangements for the Accreditation of Prior (Experiential) Learning (AP(E)L) that may be in place. The Awarding Institution should review information on student progression.

Assessment requirements

24

The examination and assessment requirements for programmes provided under a collaborative arrangement must be devised so as to ensure that the academic standards of the awards are equivalent to those of the same or comparable programmes delivered by the Awarding Institution and, as such, reflect any national benchmarks.

For franchised programmes the examination and other assessment requirements should be the same as those required by the Awarding Institution when it delivers the same or comparable programmes itself. If variations are essential these must only be made with the prior approval of the Awarding Institution which must be able to demonstrate that academic standards will not be compromised as a result.

For programmes delivered under an accreditation or validation arrangement the examination and assessment requirements should be equivalent to, and as effective as, those employed by the Awarding Institution when it delivers the same or comparable programmes itself.

25

The Awarding Institution should ensure that the Partner Organisation understands and follows the Institution's requirements for the conduct of assessments.

External examining

26

External examining procedures for programmes offered by a Partner Organisation should be the same as, or demonstrably equivalent to, those used by the Awarding Institution for its own internal programmes. The *procedures* should be clearly specified and documented, and rigorously and consistently applied.

27

The Awarding Institution should have specific policies and procedures on the recruitment and selection of external examiners for programmes provided under a collaborative arrangement. These should reflect the Awarding Institution's normal approach to the recruitment and selection of external examiners.

28

The Awarding Institution must retain responsibility for the appointment and functions of external examiners.

29

The role of external examiners in ensuring that the Awarding Institution can fulfil its responsibility for the academic standards of the awards made in its name must be clearly defined and communicated to the Partner Organisation and to the individual external examiners.

30

The respective obligations and responsibilities of the Partner Organisation and the Awarding Institution, and the external examiners, should be appropriately and clearly communicated by the Awarding Institution.

31

External examiners must receive briefing material and guidance from the Awarding Institution sufficient for them to fulfil their role effectively. They should be expected to participate in induction or training events provided by either the Awarding Institution or the Partner Organisation.

Certificates and transcripts**32**

The issuing of award certificates and transcripts should remain under the control of the Awarding Institution.

33

Subject to any overriding statutory or legal requirements or constraints in any relevant jurisdiction, the certificate or transcript should record the name of the Partner Organisation and the language of instruction where this was not English*. If the language of assessment was not the same as that used for the instruction this should also be clearly recorded on the certificate or transcript. Where the information is recorded on the transcript only, the certificate must refer to the existence of the transcript.

34

The words and terms used on the certificate should be consistent both with those used by the Awarding Institution on the certificates for the same or comparable programmes it provides and with any relevant qualifications or awards frameworks.

Information for students**35**

Information given by the Partner Organisation, or an Agent, to prospective students and to those registered on a programme, about the nature of the programme, the academic standards to be met and the quality of the provision which is offered should be approved by the Awarding Institution, define clearly the nature of the collaborative arrangement and outline the respective responsibilities of the parties.

36

The information should be comparable with that given by the Awarding Institution to its own potential and registered internal students. The information should be monitored regularly and updated as appropriate.

37

The information should include directions to students about the appropriate channels for particular concerns, complaints and appeals.

Publicity and marketing**38**

Effective control over the accuracy of all public information, publicity and promotional activity relating to the programmes and awards for which it has responsibility should be retained by the Awarding Institution, and particularly so where the information is published on its behalf. The Awarding Institution should satisfy itself through active means that this control is exercised consistently and fairly and that the public cannot be misled about the collaborative arrangement or about the nature and standing of the programmes and awards provided under the arrangement.

* See note on page 8.

Appendix 2

The working group

Mr David Bradbury	QAA
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Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality
and standards in higher education

Section 3: Students with disabilities - October 1999

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Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education: Students with disabilities

Foreword

1 This document is a code of practice for the assurance of the quality of learning opportunities for students with disabilities* in UK higher education institutions. The object of the code is to assist institutions in ensuring that students with disabilities have access to a learning experience comparable to that of their peers. It is one of a suite of inter-related documents which, taken together, will form an overall *Code of Practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* for the guidance of higher education institutions subscribing to the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (the QAA).

2 The overall *Code* and its constituent sections are being prepared by the QAA in response both to the Reports of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education and its Scottish Committee (the 'Dearing and Garrick Reports') and the consequent remodelling of the national arrangements for quality assurance in higher education. The completed *Code* will identify a comprehensive series of system-wide expectations covering matters relating to the management of academic quality and standards in higher education. In so doing, it will provide an authoritative reference point for institutions as they assure, consciously, actively and systematically, the academic quality and standards of their programmes, awards and qualifications. The *Code* will assume that, taking into account nationally agreed principles and practices, each institution has its own systems for independent verification both of its quality and standards and of the effectiveness of its quality assurance systems. In developing the *Code*, extensive guidance is being sought from a range of knowledgeable practitioners.

* Within this code the phrases 'students with disabilities' and 'disabled students' are used interchangeably. See also introductory discussion under 'Who is disabled?'

3 Each section of the *Code* is being structured into a series of precepts and accompanying outline guidance. The precepts identify those key matters which the QAA expects an institution to be able to demonstrate it is addressing effectively through its own quality assurance mechanisms. The accompanying outline guidance is provided to assist institutions in maintaining and enhancing the quality of provision for students and other stakeholders. The guidance is not intended to be either prescriptive or exhaustive: its purpose is to offer a framework for quality assurance and control which institutions may wish to use directly and adapt according to their own needs, traditions, cultures and decision-making processes. Nonetheless, in many institutions the guidance will constitute appropriate good practice.

4 To assist users, the precepts are listed, without the associated guidance, in appendix 1 to the code.

5 During the course of its quality assurance reviews, the QAA will consider the extent to which individual institutions are meeting the expectations of the precepts in the available sections of the *Code of Practice*. The Agency will report on how effectively higher education institutions individually are meeting these expectations and are discharging their responsibilities for the academic standards and quality of their programmes and awards. In doing so it will focus on the precepts themselves, and not on the associated guidance: the latter may, however, provide a helpful starting point for discussion. So far as this particular section of the *Code* is concerned, institutions will also be expected to demonstrate that, as they review their existing arrangements for students with disabilities, they are identifying any aspects which do not offer the safeguards that the precepts seek to provide and are taking appropriate action to meet any consequent shortcomings. The Agency expects that by Autumn 2000 all institutions will be able to demonstrate that they are adhering to the precepts of this section of the *Code*.

Introduction

6 This code of practice recognises that disabled students are an integral part of the academic community. It takes as its starting point the premiss that accessible and appropriate provision is not 'additional', but a core element of the overall service which an institution makes available. As such, the quality of the learning opportunities on offer to disabled students in higher education institutions needs to be assured in the same way as any other provision.

7 The development of this section of the QAA's *Code of Practice* was undertaken by a group including representatives of higher education institutions, the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals (CVCP), the Standing Conference of Principals (SCOP), and specialist bodies promoting access for students with disabilities. Members of the working group are listed in appendix 2. The group benefited from being able to draw on a range of existing publications, including several that provide more detailed operational guidance that may be of interest to institutions in developing their own arrangements.

8 All institutions face many competing demands on their resources. It may appear that the needs of disabled students are not central to institutional survival and should therefore give way to issues of 'higher' priority. When setting their priorities, however, institutions will want to take into account that the quality of their overall provision will be measured, in part, on how well they meet the expectations of this code.

9 Disabled people have been under-represented within higher education. Poor physical access to buildings has created a barrier for some students, while others have been excluded by teaching methods that do not take full account of their needs. Facilities beyond the classroom have been inaccessible in some institutions; in others the attitudes of staff may have been less than welcoming.

10 The code is not a charter for disabled students, and does not attempt to offer a blueprint for best practice in provision; but it does provide some pointers towards good practice. It will be for institutions to

determine which approaches to meeting the standards set by the precepts best suit their own culture and ethos. It is expected that the code will help to raise standards of provision for disabled students.

11 Nevertheless, there are likely to be some common features amongst those institutions that measure up well to the code's expectations. For example, institutions which are already active in this area tend to have an ethos that attentively embraces equal opportunities, and be working to widen them. They have senior managers with an active interest in how access is progressing, and who take seriously the budgetary and other implications of their commitment. In these institutions consideration of the needs of disabled students is a dimension in all decisions and activities, and the intervention of a disability co-ordinator is viewed as a welcome injection of specialist expertise, rather than an obstruction to the smooth pursuit of 'more important' priorities.

12 The code focuses on the quality assurance aspects of the level of provision for disabled students, and does not try to offer extensive practical advice. Institutions wanting further practical guidance will find a wealth of expertise within the sector, in printed publications, on the world wide web and from voluntary organisations. Some further reading and web site addresses are suggested in appendix 3 and institutions are encouraged to make full use of the resources available to them. Disabled students already enrolled on programmes are often a useful source of advice. Their participation at every stage of provision, from design to evaluation, is likely to ensure that developments are both effective and efficient in increasing access and improving the quality of disabled students' experience of higher education.

13 Higher education institutions will also have gained an understanding of the needs of disabled people as a result of meeting their legal responsibilities towards disabled employees and users of goods, facilities and services. These responsibilities, acquired through the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, do not as yet extend to institutions' role as providers of education. Nevertheless, the experience gained in this way will no doubt be helpful in considering what action to take to improve participation by disabled students.

14 The Disability Discrimination Act also introduced a requirement on institutions to publish disability statements. Disability statements are useful ways of communicating to students the approach and level of provision within an institution. Students use them to make informed choices about their future. Institutions may wish to use disability statements to publicise the way in which they are meeting the expectations set out in the code.

Who is disabled?

15 There are many different ways of defining who is disabled. This code follows no particular model. Institutions should be aware that disability covers a wide range of impairments including physical and mobility difficulties, hearing impairments, visual impairments, specific learning difficulties including dyslexia, medical conditions and mental health problems. Some of these impairments may have few, if any, implications for a student's life or study. Others may have little impact on day to day life but may have a major impact on a student's study, or vice versa. Some students may already be disabled when they apply to an institution, others may become disabled or become aware of an existing disability only after their programme has started. Others may have fluctuating conditions. Some students may be disabled temporarily by accident or illness.

16 Institutions will want to ensure that their provision and structures take into account, so far as possible, the full range of needs which disabled students may have, and that their provision is sufficiently flexible to cater to individuals' changing needs throughout their periods of study.

Precepts and guidance

(The precepts are contained in the grey boxes: see paragraphs 3 and 4 of the Foreword.)

General principles

1

Institutions should ensure that in all their policies, procedures and activities, including strategic planning and resource allocation, consideration is given to the means of enabling disabled students' participation in all aspects of the academic and social life of the institution.

Institutions should consider:

- implementing procedures which ensure that the needs of students with disabilities are addressed at all stages and levels of academic and resource planning;
- embedding the fair and equal treatment of disabled students in all operational practices;
- identifying clearly the locus of senior management responsibilities in relation to arrangements for students with disabilities;
- ensuring that senior managers and other key staff have an adequate understanding of the legal framework concerning disabled people;
- ensuring that management systems include the gathering of information to enable well-informed decisions to be made regarding participation and progression of students with disabilities;
- including the needs of disabled students within the remits of all resource allocation, academic management, estates and services committees;

- incorporating the views of disabled students in the development and review of the physical environment, academic programmes and services;
- identifying designated contact(s) for disabled students with specialist expertise and effective channels of communication with senior managers;
- providing staff development in disability awareness/equality for all staff;
- monitoring and reviewing the impact of all institutional policies, procedures and practices on students with disabilities with a view to continuous improvement;
- the implications for disabled students of collaborative provision and articulation of arrangements involving study in more than one institution and/or other partner organisation.

The physical environment

2

Institutions should ensure that disabled students can have access to the physical environment in which they will study, learn, live and take part in the social life of their institution.

Institutions should consider:

- undertaking a physical access audit of all buildings, including halls of residence, teaching and learning accommodation and resources, leisure and recreational facilities (covering general access and health and safety);
- establishing plans to improve physical accessibility that are effectively linked to resource allocation procedures and enable progress to be monitored and evaluated;

- having in place policies and procedures which ensure that the needs of disabled students are taken into account when any new building work or refurbishment of existing buildings is to take place;
- making arrangements to ensure that landscaping, car parking, and on-site and inter-site transport take account of access by disabled students;
- flexible and imaginative approaches to enabling alternative means of participation where physical access is impossible or unreasonably difficult;
- flexibility regarding where classes are held, including moving teaching from inaccessible lecture theatres/classrooms to more accessible ones;
- informed timetabling arrangements which ensure that there is enough time between classes to enable students with mobility impairments to travel between them.

3

Institutions should ensure that facilities and equipment are as accessible as possible to disabled students.

Institutions should consider the requirements of disabled students in such matters as:

- the height and layout of classroom tables and laboratory benches;
- supporting access around the campus with appropriate signage and information, such as large print and Braille notices, tactile maps and maps showing wheelchair-accessible routes;
- the publication and dissemination of information, in accessible formats, on physical access;
- the use of tone and colour contrasting in both the interior and exterior of buildings for visually-impaired students;

- the provision of appropriately adapted and well-sited accessible toilet facilities;
- the design and layout of seating especially in raked lecture theatres and computer laboratories;
- lighting design;
- systems of amplification and availability of induction loop or infra-red systems for hearing aid users;
- acoustics, including the minimising of background noise from fans in projection equipment, computers, heating or ventilation systems;
- ease of use of equipment in laboratories, computer and teaching rooms;
- alternative safety systems such as flashing fire alarms or vibrating pagers.

Information for applicants, students and staff

4

The institution's publicity, programme details and general information should be accessible to people with disabilities and describe the opportunities for disabled students to participate.

Institutions should consider implementing arrangements which ensure that:

- the disability statement provides clear and accurate information in accessible media on the physical environment, the human and technical support available and any costs that students will be expected to bear;
- electronic information, including web sites, is accessible to students with disabilities;

- information on placement opportunities, where relevant, is available at an early stage;
- details of the designated contact(s) for disabled students are widely publicised;
- responses to enquiries from people with disabilities are prompt and candid and include advice from experienced, specialist staff.

The selection and admission of students

5

in selecting students institutions should ensure equitable consideration of all applicants.

Institutions should consider:

- ensuring that criteria and procedures used for selecting students are relevant to the requirements of the programme, including any professional requirements, and do not unjustifiably disadvantage or debar applicants with disabilities;
- ensuring that appropriate support is offered and available for applicants attending interviews and other selection activities;
- providing disability awareness/equality guidance and training for all tutors and administrative staff involved in selection and admissions;
- where appropriate, offering disabled applicants the opportunity to demonstrate their ability to use alternative ways for meeting programme requirements.

6

Disabled applicants' support needs should be identified and assessed in an effective and timely way, taking into account the applicant's views.

Institutions should consider:

- developing an environment within which individuals feel able to disclose their disability;
- providing specialist advice which draws on recognised sources of expertise to assess applicants' support needs, in order to ensure that decisions by admissions tutors and disabled students are as well-informed as possible;
- developing systems which ensure that applicants with disabilities are not subject to undue disadvantage in terms of support. If they apply later through the 'clearing' procedure;
- drawing up agreements with individual disabled students and all concerned parties which specify details of support and other arrangements, including those for course examinations and assessments (precept 18 below).

Enrolment, registration and induction of students

7

The arrangements for enrolment, registration and induction of new entrants should accommodate the needs of disabled students.

Institutions should consider implementing arrangements which ensure that:

- enrolment procedures and induction events take into account the access requirements of disabled students;
- enrolment forms and other relevant forms are modified to enable students with disabilities to complete them with the same levels of independence and confidentiality as other students;
- when information about disability is collected, the purpose of collection is made clear and the measures taken to ensure confidentiality are outlined;

- staff who are responsible for organising induction programmes take into account the requirements of students with disabilities including orientation training for, for example, visually impaired students;
- during enrolment and induction, there are opportunities to identify or reconsider the support needs of disabled entrants and to confirm that they are in place.

Learning and teaching, including provision for research and other postgraduate students

8

Programme specifications should include no unnecessary barriers to access by disabled people.

Institutions should consider establishing procedures which ensure that:

- the setting and/or amendment of academic and other programme requirements during approval or validation processes includes well-informed consideration of the requirements of disabled students;
- programme specifications and descriptions give sufficient information to enable students with disabilities and staff to make informed decisions about the ability to complete the programme.

9

Academic support services and guidance should be accessible and appropriate to the needs of disabled students.

in developing academic support and guidance structures and procedures institutions should consider implementing arrangements which ensure that:

- information about course choice and content is fully accessible to disabled students;

- all staff who advise students are aware of any aspects of courses that may raise barriers or be inaccessible to students with particular disabilities;
- the academic facilities and support available to non-disabled students including library, IT and careers services, are fully accessible and appropriate to disabled students.

10

The delivery of programmes should take into account the needs of disabled people or, where appropriate, be adapted to accommodate their individual requirements.

Institutions should consider making arrangements which ensure that all academic and technical staff:

- plan and employ teaching and learning strategies which make the delivery of the programme as inclusive as is reasonably possible;
- know and understand the learning implications of any disabilities of the students whom they teach, and are responsive to student feedback;
- make individual adaptations to delivery that are appropriate for particular students, which might include providing handouts in advance and/or in different formats (Braille, disk), short breaks for interpreters to rest, or using radio microphone systems, or flexible/interrupted study for students with mental health difficulties.

Institutions should consider implementing IT and computer arrangements which maximise disabled students' access to learning, including:

- IT strategies and procedures that pay due attention to the needs of disabled students;

- ensuring that any courseware and electronic learning materials are fully accessible to disabled students using, If necessary, alternative hardware or software;
- installing appropriate specialist hardware and software on computer facilities;
- ensuring that computer services staff have appropriate training and time to meet the needs of disabled students.

11

Institutions should ensure that, wherever possible, disabled students have access to academic and vocational placements including field trips and study abroad.

Where placements, including international placements, are a formal requirement or standard component of the programme, institutions should consider ways of ensuring that the specified learning opportunities are available to disabled students by:

- seeking placements in accessible contexts;
- providing specialist guidance on international placements;
- re-locating field trips to alternative sites or providing alternative experiences where comparable opportunities are available which satisfy the learning outcomes;
- working with placement providers to ensure accessibility;
- providing support before, during and after placements that takes account of the needs of any disabled students, including transport needs.

Where a placement is an optional but desirable element of the programme, institutions should consider making similar arrangements to support access for disabled students.

12

Disabled research students should receive the support and guidance necessary to secure equal access to research programmes.

Institutions should consider ways of ensuring that supervisors:

- know the learning implications of any disabilities of students whom they supervise;
- agree with the students, where appropriate, mutually acceptable alternative methods of carrying out research.

(See also the QAA's code of practice on postgraduate research programmes.)

Examination, assessment and progression

13

Assessment and examination policies, practices and procedures should provide disabled students with the same opportunity as their peers to demonstrate the achievement of learning outcomes.

Institutions should consider implementing procedures for agreeing alternative assessment and examination arrangements when necessary that:

- are widely publicised and easy for students to follow;
- operate with minimum delay;
- allow flexibility in the conduct of the assessment;
- protect the rigour and comparability of the assessment;
- are applied consistently across the institution;
- are not dependent on students' individual funding arrangements.

Institutions may wish to consider the following adjustments:

- flexibility in the balance between assessed course work and examinations;
- demonstration of achievement in alternative ways, such as through signed presentations or viva voce examinations;
- additional time allowances, rest breaks and re-scheduling of examinations;
- the use of computers, amanuenses, readers and other support in examinations;
- the availability of examinations or the presentation of assessed work in alternative formats (eg modifying carrier language);
- the provision of additional rooms and invigilators for those using alternative arrangements.

Institutions should have policies and procedures in place which enable disabled students to participate in ceremonial events.

14

Where studying is interrupted as a direct result of a disability-related cause, this should not unjustifiably impede a student's subsequent academic progress.

Institutions should consider ways of ensuring that where reliable evidence is provided that delayed completion of assessed work, non-attendance at examinations, deferral or withdrawal has been due to a disability-related cause, this is recorded in non-prejudicial terms in all academic progress files.

Staff development

15

Induction and other relevant training programmes for all staff should include disability awareness/equality and training in specific services and support.

Institutions should consider providing disability training as part of induction and development programmes for all staff, including part-time and contract staff. This might cover:

- basic disability awareness/equality;
- the implications of disability for the learning and teaching process for all staff involved in admissions, learning/teaching and assessment, curriculum development and learning resource provision;
- the range and types of support available to disabled people relevant to the education context for staff involved in admissions, learning and teaching and curriculum development;
- accessible and alternative teaching strategies for teaching staff and those involved in curriculum development;
- the needs of disabled students for those designing or managing the physical environment.

in addition, institutions should consider:

- ensuring that training programmes are flexible enough to allow specific training on working with students with particular disabilities to be made available to individual staff when the need arises;
- making the necessary arrangements for staff to attend such training programmes, eg by providing designated time for staff development;
- bringing in specialist expertise to provide training on some aspects of disability provision and awareness;

- providing guidance notes for staff on disability awareness/equality and sources of support;
- ensuring access to appropriate continuing professional development for the designated contact(s) for disabled students.

Access to general facilities and support

16

Students with disabilities should have access to the full range of support services that are available to their non-disabled peers.

Institutions should consider ensuring that:

- support and welfare services (and information about these) are as accessible as possible;
- where existing services cannot be made available, alternative services and arrangements should be readily accessible.

Additional specialist support

17

Institutions should ensure that there are sufficient designated members of staff with appropriate skills and experience to provide specialist advice and support to disabled applicants and students, and to the staff who work with them.

Institutions should consider ensuring that the designated staff:

- have sufficient administrative support;
- provide timely and accurate advice about appropriate IT equipment, academic and administrative matters, daily living and financial support;

- develop effective liaison with staff and student contacts;
- support students in a way that facilitates their becoming independent members of the academic and student community.

18

Institutions should identify and seek to meet the particular needs of individual disabled students.

Institutions should consider:

- means for establishing early contact with disabled applicants, especially those with complex academic and/or daily living support needs, in order to identify appropriate sources or systems of support;
- how best to ensure that all students who can benefit from the services available to them are aware of those services;
- ensuring that they have effective means of delivering the particular specialist support needs identified for each student;
- establishing regular and effective links with external statutory and voluntary agencies to provide appropriate support;
- putting in place arrangements to ensure the quality of the specialist support provided.

Institutions should consider regularly reviewing the support arrangements agreed with disabled applicants and students (precept 6 above) to ensure that these are being met and are responsive to their current needs.

19

Internal communications systems should ensure that appropriate staff receive information about the particular needs of disabled students in a clear and timely way.

Institutions should consider:

- the importance of ensuring that information about students' needs is communicated in good time to appropriate academic, support and residential staff;
- how to ensure effective communication, for example within or between academic departments, as students move from one year or one department to another.

20

Institutions should have a clearly defined policy on the confidentiality and disclosure of information relating to a person's disabilities that is communicated to applicants, students and staff.

Institutions should consider:

- informing all applicants, students and staff of institutional policies relating to the confidentiality and disclosure of personal information on disabilities, including information that is gathered for monitoring purposes;
- ensuring that procedures are in place which both protect an individual's privacy and permit necessary disclosure for the provision of effective support for disabled students or to ensure health and safety.

Complaints

(See also the QAA's code of practice on student complaints and appeals.)

21

Institutions should ensure that information about all complaints and appeals policies and procedures is available in accessible formats and communicated to students.

22

Institutions should have in place policies and procedures to deal with complaints arising directly or indirectly from a student's disability.

Institutions should consider ensuring that the policies established in relation to appeals, complaints, equal opportunities, harassment, disciplinary and grievance procedures cover disability issues.

Monitoring and evaluation

23

Institutional information systems should monitor the applications, admissions, academic progress and nature of impairment of disabled students.

24

Institutions should operate systems to monitor the effectiveness of provision for students with disabilities, evaluate progress and identify opportunities for enhancement.

Institutions should consider:

- creating a development plan, consistent with and informed by the disability statement, which can be used as a reference tool to evaluate progress;
- incorporating the views of disabled students in development planning;
- evaluating the outcomes of specific projects.

Appendix 1

The precepts

(Note: The precepts are printed here without the guidance notes for ease of reference.)

General principles

1

Institutions should ensure that in all their policies, procedures and activities, including strategic planning and resource allocation, consideration is given to the means of enabling disabled students' participation in all aspects of the academic and social life of the institution.

The physical environment

2

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3

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The institution's publicity, programme details and general Information should be accessible to people with disabilities and describe the opportunities for disabled students to participate.

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Appendix 2

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Appendix 3

Related publications

Access to success for students with disabilities in higher education in Scotland (SHEFC, 1996).

Base-level provision for disabled students (HEFCE 99/04).

Disability statements. A guide to good practice (HEFCE 98/66).

Alan Hurst (ed), *Higher education and disabled students: international approaches* (Ashgate Publishing, 1998).

Resource directory of disability-related products and services (HEFCE/Skill/eQuip).

Students with disabilities: code of practice for Australian tertiary institutions (February 1998).

John Hall and Teresa Tinklin, 'Students first : disabled students in higher education', *Spotlights*, The Scottish Council for Research in Education, Research Report 85 (1998).

The co-ordinator's handbook (Skill, September 1997).

Specific publications

Bridging the gap: a guide to the disabled students' allowances in higher education 1998-99 (DfEE, 1998).

Guidelines for accessible courseware (HEFCE 99/05).

Dyslexia in higher education: policy, provision and practice (National Working Party on Dyslexia in Higher Education, University of Hull, 1999).

Alan Hurst, 'Students with disabilities and opportunities to study abroad', *Journal of studies in international education*, 2: 2, Fall 1998.

Report to the European Commission DG XXII on... the participation of students with disabilities in Socrates 1996-98, Association for Higher Education, Access and Disability (May 1998).

Web sites

www.daras.co.uk

www.disinhe.ac.uk

www.equipservices.hefce.ac.uk

www.skill.org.uk

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Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality
and standards in higher education

Section 4: External examining - January 2000

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Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education: External examining

Foreword

1 This document is a code of practice for external examining in UK higher education institutions. It is one of a suite of inter-related documents which, taken together, will form an overall *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* for the guidance of higher education institutions subscribing to the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (the QAA).

2 The overall *Code* and its constituent sections are being prepared by the Agency in response both to the Reports of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education and its Scottish Committee (the 'Dealing*' and 'Carrick' Reports) and the consequent remodelling of the national arrangements for quality assurance in higher education. The completed *Code* will identify a comprehensive series of system-wide expectations covering matters relating to the management of academic quality and standards in higher education. In so doing, it will provide an authoritative reference point for institutions as they consciously, actively and systematically assure the academic quality and standards of their programmes, awards and qualifications. The *Code* assumes that, taking into account nationally agreed principles and practices, each institution has its own systems for independent verification both of its quality and standards and of the effectiveness of its quality assurance systems. In developing the *Code*, extensive advice is being sought from a range of knowledgeable practitioners.

3 Each section of the *Code* will be structured into a series of precepts and accompanying outline guidance. The precepts identify those key matters which the Agency expects an institution to be able to demonstrate it is addressing effectively through its own quality assurance mechanisms. The accompanying outline guidance is provided to assist institutions in maintaining and enhancing the quality of provision for students and other stakeholders. The guidance is not intended to be either prescriptive or exhaustive: its purpose is to offer a framework for quality assurance and control which institutions may wish to use and adapt according to their own needs, traditions, cultures and decision-making processes. Nonetheless, in many institutions the guidance will constitute appropriate good practice.

4 To assist users, the precepts are listed, without the associated guidance, in Appendix 1 to the code.

5 During the course of its quality assurance reviews, the QAA will consider the extent to which individual institutions are meeting the expectations of the precepts in the available sections of the *Code of practice*. The Agency will report on how effectively higher education institutions individually are meeting these expectations and are discharging their responsibilities for the academic standards and quality of their programmes and awards. In doing so it will focus on the precepts themselves, and not on the associated guidance: the latter may, however, provide a helpful starting point for discussion. Some of the

precepts in this section of the code are preceded by brief contextual matter; this is intended to help readers to understand why the precepts have been included and does not form part of the precepts or of the Agency's expectations of institutions.

6 External examining provides one of the principal means for the maintenance of nationally comparable standards within autonomous higher education institutions. This section of the *Code* looks forward to likely developments in the way academic quality and standards are assured in the UK. It makes reference, for example, to subject benchmarking, the national qualifications frameworks and institutional programme specifications in the expectation that these will increasingly become part of the publicly available information that will inform judgements on standards and their assurance. A transition period is anticipated for the development of such work within institutions but the Agency expects that from autumn 2001 all institutions will be able to demonstrate progress towards adherence to the precepts.

Introduction

7 In the UK's system of higher education, institutions are responsible for the standards and quality of the education they provide and the awards they offer. This code assumes that all institutions will use external examiners to assist them to monitor the standards of all of their awards except those granted on an honorary basis. External examiners act as independent and impartial advisors providing institutions with informed comment on the standards set and student achievement in relation to those standards. External examining is therefore an integral and very important part of institutional quality assurance.

8 The main purposes of external examining are to verify that standards are appropriate for the award or award elements which the external examiner has been appointed to examine, to assist institutions in the comparison of academic standards across higher education awards and award elements, and ensure that their assessment processes are fair and are fairly operated and are in line with the institution's regulations. In addition to undertaking these essential functions, external examiners may be given other responsibilities by particular institutions. This code does not seek to restrict such extensions of the role, although it does state the need for both parties to be agreed on them, and on any associated powers assigned to undertake them effectively. Any extensions of the role(s) of external examiners should not in any way reduce the effectiveness of, or conflict with, the main purposes of external examining.

9 There is wide variation between institutions in the detail of their practices for external examining. This code seeks to ensure that, without inhibiting such local diversity or hindering innovative approaches, a UK-wide basis exists for the security of the standards of the awards of individual institutions.

10 In the new approach to quality assurance being developed by the QAA, academic reviewers will be engaged at both programme and institutional levels. It is important that there should be no misunderstanding about the respective roles of academic reviewers and external examiners. Academic reviewers will not be involved in the examination process and will have distinctly different responsibilities from those of external examiners. It is the external examiners' task to scrutinise on a continuing basis and report to their contracting institutions on whether particular students' performances have been judged properly against the institution's awards standards and whether the assessment process has measured outcomes appropriately and been conducted fairly. Once every six years academic reviewers will identify more broadly whether the standards set by an awarding institution are at an appropriate level. In doing so they may wish to comment on the standards of particular programmes in comparison to similar programmes elsewhere; they will not intervene with respect to the assessment of individual students. One part of the information sought by academic reviewers in their assessment of an institution's standards and practices will be provided by scrutiny of the effectiveness of an institution's procedures relating to external examining, and the extent of its adherence to the precepts of this code. The respective roles of external examiners and academic reviewers are summarised in appendix 3.

11 In view of the importance of external examining to the assurance of the standards of the awards of individual institutions, the QAA expects that institutions will wish to encourage staff both to prepare for, and undertake, external examining, as part of their continuing professional development. The increasing diversity of programmes and modes of study within higher education also suggests that it is likely that institutions will see merit in appointing, where appropriate, external examiners with professional or practice-based expertise, in addition to those with more typical academic backgrounds.

12 It is not part of the QAA's remit to comment on how much institutions should pay their external examiners. However, institutions will wish to ensure that they are able to recruit and retain suitable individuals to maintain the effectiveness of the external examining process.

13 This section of the QAA's *Code of practice* covers the external examining of programmes and programme components, rather than instances where external examiners are appointed to consider an individual student (eg for the examination of research theses). It makes reference to, and should where appropriate also be applied with, other sections of the *Code* including those dealing with collaborative provision and postgraduate research programmes.

Precepts and guidance

General principle

The external examining function should assist institutions to ensure that:

- the academic standard for each award and award element is set and maintained by the awarding institution at the appropriate level and that student performance is properly judged against this;
- the assessment process measures student achievement against the intended outcomes of the programme appropriately, and is fair and fairly operated;
- institutions are able to compare the standards of their awards with those of other higher education institutions.

To facilitate confidence in the external examining system at a UK-wide level, a core set of functions required of all external examiners is identified in precept 1.

1

An institution should require its external examiners, in their expert judgement, to report on:

- i) whether the standards set are appropriate for its awards, or award elements, by reference to published national subject benchmarks, the national qualifications frameworks, institutional programme specifications and other relevant information;
- ii) the standards of student performance in those programmes or parts of programmes which they have been appointed to examine, and on the comparability of the standards with those of similar programmes or parts of programmes in other UK higher education institutions;
- iii) the extent to which its processes for assessment, examination, and the determination of awards are sound and have been fairly conducted.

The roles of external examiners

Institutions employ external examiners in a range of roles. Besides the primary role in the assurance of the academic standards of their programmes and awards, institutions may ask external examiners to undertake additional roles. Any such additional roles should not conflict with or compromise the primary role.

2

Institutions should state clearly the various roles, powers and responsibilities assigned to their external examiners.

in considering the functions of external examining, institutions will need to determine how their processes relate to, for example:

- the setting of their own standards, including any associated with professional and statutory bodies;
- the maintenance and verification of these standards;
- the design of programmes and their component parts;
- evaluation of the soundness of their assessment policies and procedures, and their development;
- evaluation of the standards of achievement;

and whether these are articulated as a general statement applying to all of their external examiners, or as particular statements for each programme as required.

in considering the roles of external examiners, institutions will need to decide whether external examiners:

- should make judgements separately from internal examiners, and/or act as moderators of assessments and/or, exceptionally, act as additional markers on a par with internal examiners;
- should have the power to adjust marks or decisions for individuals or students collectively, and on what basis of (sampled) assessed work.

Institutions should indicate the extent of their external examiners' powers to:

- obtain reasonable access to the assessed parts of any programme, including evidence about a student's performance on placement where this is an assessed part of any programme;
- overrule assessments or change marks made by internal examiners;
- determine the method for, and the extent of, sampling of students' work for external scrutiny;
- request additional marking of students' work;
- select candidates for, and determine the nature of, *viva voce* examinations;
- determine the extent of any compensation within aggregated assessments;
- participate in decisions relating to cases of suspected or proven cheating /assessment offences by students.

Institutions may wish to define other roles for their external examiners, and grant them additional powers.

3

Prior to the publication of mark lists, pass lists or similar documents, institutions should require external examiners to endorse the outcomes of the assessment(s) they have been appointed to scrutinise.

Institutions should consider carefully:

- the significance of the signature of external examiners when attached to pass lists, assessment marks or similar documents, and clarification of this to external examiners;
- in the event of an external examiner being unwilling to endorse the outcomes of the assessment processes, how the matter will be determined within the institution.

There is at present wide variation in practice in respect of the significance of external examiners' signatures: institutions will need to inform external examiners of the extent to which their signature, in addition to indicating their endorsement of the decisions of the examination or awarding board:

- may limit any further consideration of the marks or awards at any subsequent stage of the examination process;
- is taken to indicate that processes have been carried out in accordance with the conventions of the institution.

Nomination and appointment

Good practice in the nomination, selection and appointment of external examiners is likely to be achieved when a senior academic body takes direct or indirect responsibility for approving applications for the appointment of external examiners within an institution, and when it ensures that:

- criteria for the identification, nomination and appointment of candidates are understood and accessible to all staff initiating appointments;
- nominations are assessed effectively and rigorously.

4

Institutions should define explicit policies and regulations governing the nomination and appointment of external examiners, and premature termination of their contract.

Institutions are responsible for the number and deployment of their external examiners. in discharging this responsibility, institutions should consider carefully the need to:

- develop criteria, where appropriate in discussion with statutory and professional bodies, to support the nomination and appointment of external examiners, and monitor whether these criteria are being followed;

- develop criteria that are sufficiently inclusive to allow for the nomination of external examiners with little or no prior experience of external examining;
- identify the period of appointment, that might normally be for between three and five years;
- have an approval process that includes consideration of appropriate documentation in support of nominations;
- maintain and operate systems for the appointment of external examiners that include consideration and confirmation of nominations at institutional level;
- avoid reciprocal appointments with departments/schools of other institutions [see * to precept 6];
- keep a central register of appointments and periods of tenure;
- develop criteria and procedures for the early termination of an external examiner's contract.

Where more than one examiner is appointed to a programme or programme unit, institutions may wish to seek the phasing of examiner appointments to enable the mentoring of new examiners.

5

Institutions should ensure that their external examiners are competent to undertake the responsibilities defined in their contract.

Institutions should consider developing and employing criteria to support the appointment of external examiners, which will normally make reference to:

- appropriate levels of academic and/or professional expertise and experience in relation to the relevant subject area and assessment;
- the ability to command the respect of colleagues;
- the need not to exclude otherwise well-qualified candidates on the grounds that they have no previous experience as external examiners.

6

Institutional procedures should ensure that potential conflict(s) of interest **are** identified and resolved prior to appointment of external examiners.

Institutions should consider:

- the maximum number of external examinerships they would normally expect or allow their appointees to hold*;
- the normal number of reappointments and periods between reappointments*;
- how they would normally avoid appointing external examiners with any direct interest or ties to the institution or its staff, programmes or students, and how conflicts of interest will be dealt with where such *appointments* are *unavoidable**;

- the period which should elapse before a former member of staff or student could be appointed*;
 - other than in exceptional circumstances, the avoidance of reciprocal arrangements between departments*;
 - whether an examiner can be succeeded by another from the same institution*.
- *Institutions will need to identify any particular exceptions to their normal policies to allow for subject areas where there are a very limited number of potential external examiners.*

7

Institutions should ensure that potential external examiners are provided with sufficient information to enable them to identify whether they can carry out their responsibilities effectively.

Institutions should consider carefully how they can provide potential external examiners with adequate documentation to enable both the nominee and the institution to proceed to the approval stage of appointment with a shared understanding of the role. Such information might include, for example:

- an introduction to the institution's policies, procedures and regulations concerning the structure and administration of its examining and awarding boards;
- the general responsibilities of the external examiners;
- the institution's policies on equal opportunities;
- information on the programmes and units, and their assessment, for which the external examiner will have responsibility;
- contractual arrangements, including rates of payment, expenses, tenure and dates of examiners' meetings;
- relevant aspects of policies and procedures of the institution, including those relating to academic quality assurance and standards, teaching and learning, and equal opportunities;
- an individual examiner's role in relation to the examining team as a whole and the extent of their discretion.

Preparation of external examiners

8

An institution should provide for the proper preparation of its external examiners to ensure that they understand and can fulfil their responsibilities. This should include a written briefing, for all of its examiners, on the institution's policies for assessment and external examining in general, together with appropriate specific course documentation.

Institutions should consider:

- providing opportunities for the external examiner to become familiar with the institution and to discuss their responsibilities and other matters prior to the first visit to undertake assessments;
- the particular support needs of external examiners with little or no previous experience of the role, or examiners who are appointed from outside higher education.

External examining

9

At least one external examiner should be appointed for all educational programmes or parts of programmes that contribute to an award of an institution.

in employing external examiners to assist in establishing their standards, institutions should consider carefully:

- how the judgements of their external examiners are expected to relate to agreed reference standards eg subject benchmark statements, and are informed by appropriate evidence;
- the relationship between the numbers of external examiners and the quantity of assessed material being examined;
- whether external examiners are to be involved in scrutinising work required solely for progression to subsequent stages of a programme leading to an award;
- whether different levels of scrutiny are acceptable for those assessments that would normally be required solely for progression rather than contributing directly to an award, eg level 1 work that does not contribute specific marks to an award at degree level;
- whether more than one examiner is needed for a programme that is academically diverse;
- how examiners will be deployed to assess the overall standards and coherence of combined studies and multidisciplinary programmes.

10

Institutions should discuss with their external examiners the evidence the examiner deems necessary to discharge his/her responsibilities.

in determining the external examiner's role in setting or approving assessment mechanisms, institutions should consider carefully:

- whether external examiners should be entitled to hold a *viva voce*, at their discretion;
- whether external examiners should be entitled to meet students on programmes and programme units they are examining;

- what evidence might be provided to satisfy an external examiner that students had not been trained merely to be able to answer set examination questions/coursework and no more;
- how external examiners are to be provided with adequate opportunity to hold meetings with internal examiners;
- how external examiners can be given early notification of their required attendance at the institution;
- under what exceptional circumstances external examiners would not be required or expected to attend the examiners' meetings, or awarding boards that consider the modules, programme parts or programmes they were employed to examine.

11

in respect of collaborative provision, external examining procedures for programmes offered by a partner organisation should be the same as, or demonstrably equivalent to, those used by the awarding institution for its own programmes. The procedures should be clearly specified and documented, and rigorously and consistently applied.

Institutions should also refer to the *QAA Code of practice: Collaborative provision*, and in particular to precepts 27 to 31 inclusive and their guidance notes, and the *QAA Guidelines for distance learning*.

External examiners' reports

External examiners are appointed by an institution and their reports are an important component of both an institution's internal and any external quality assurance processes. Institutions should consider carefully their requirements with regard to such reports and advise external examiners explicitly.

12

Institutions should require external examiners to prepare at agreed times a written report that provides comments and judgements on the assessment process and the standards of student attainment.

When identifying the reporting requirements for their external examiners, institutions should consider:

- the timing of reports;
- the level of confidentiality that reports will be afforded;
- requesting the submission of an overview report prepared at the end of a term of office;

- how, on an exceptional basis, provision might be made for the submission to the head of the institution of a confidential report where the external examiner wishes to raise matters of particular importance and/or sensitivity.

13

Institutions should indicate the required form and coverage of external examiners' reports.

An institution should specify:

- those aspects that it requires external examiners to comment upon. These should be consistent with the roles and duties specified on appointment;
- whether it requires the use of standard report forms, or particular question headings which indicate the nature and type of information sought from external examiners;
- what action it will take if an external examiner does not comply with the required form and coverage of report.

Reporting requirements will be tailored to the arrangements and needs of the institution but reports might normally be expected to comment on, for example:

- the standards demonstrated by the students;
- the extent to which standards are appropriate for the award or award element under consideration;
- the design, structure and marking of assessments;
- the procedures for assessments and examinations;
- whether or not external examiners have had sufficient access to, and the power to call upon, any material needed to make the required judgements;
- where possible, students' performance in relation to their peers on comparable courses;
- the coherence of the policies and procedures relating to external examiners and their consonance with the explicit roles required of them;

and might additionally comment on, for example, some or all of the following:

- the curriculum, its aims, content and development;
- resources as they impact upon student performance in assessments;
- the basis and rationale for any comparisons of standards made;
- the strengths and weaknesses of the students as a cohort;
- the quality of teaching and learning methods which may be indicated by student performance.

Use of external examiners' reports within the institution

The reports of its external examiners are a crucial element of the process by which an institution assures the quality of its standards and awards. As such, the reports should be received by the head of the awarding institution.

14

Institutions should request that external examiners' reports are formally addressed to the head of the institution, or to specific individuals designated by the head of the institution to exercise responsibility for the handling of these reports.

Institutions should ensure that the reports are considered within the institution at a senior level.

15

Full consideration should be given by the institution to comments and recommendations contained within the reports of external examiners, and the outcomes of the consideration, including actions taken, should be formally recorded.

Institutions should consider carefully how their procedures will:

- provide for the detailed consideration of the reports;
- take account of the evidence within the reports along with the responses from departments concerned, and maintain a record of such consideration;
- ensure that those responsible for a particular examination or assessment are made aware of and, if necessary, monitor any changes which occur as a result of the relevant external examiner's report;
- specify the forms of feedback used to inform external examiners of any consequential action taken as a result of their reporting.

in cases where the requirements of external professional bodies are the focus of comments, there may be a need to inform those bodies of action taken in response to the external examiner's report.

Feedback to external examiners on their reports

16

Institutions should ensure that external examiners are, within a reasonable time, provided with a response to their comments and recommendations, including information on any actions taken by the institution.

in identifying how they have responded or will respond to the reports of their external examiners, institutions should consider providing external examiners with:

- information on the detailed consideration of their report(s);
- an indication of any actions taken as a result of their reporting;
- clear reasons for not accepting any recommendations or suggestions.

Appendix 1

The precepts

General principle

1

An institution should require its external examiners, in their expert judgement, to report on:

- i) whether the standards set are appropriate for its awards, or award elements, by reference to published national subject benchmarks, the national qualifications frameworks, institutional programme specifications and other relevant information;
- ii) the standards of student performance in those programmes or parts of programmes which they have been appointed to examine, and on the comparability of the standards with those of similar programmes or parts of programmes in other UK higher education institutions;
- iii) the extent to which its processes for assessment, examination, and the determination of awards are sound and have been fairly conducted.

The roles of external examiners

2

Institutions should state clearly the various roles, powers and responsibilities assigned to their external examiners.

3

Prior to the publication of mark lists, pass lists or similar documents, institutions should require external examiners to endorse the outcomes of the assessment(s) they have been appointed to scrutinise.

Nomination and appointment

4
Institutions should define explicit policies and regulations governing the nomination and appointment of external examiners, and premature termination of their contract.

5
Institutions should ensure that their external examiners are competent to undertake the responsibilities defined in their contract.

6
Institutional procedures should ensure that potential conflict(s) of interest are identified and resolved prior to appointment of external examiners.

7
Institutions should ensure that potential external examiners are provided with sufficient information to enable them to identify whether they can carry out their responsibilities effectively.

Preparation of external examiners

8
An institution should provide for the proper preparation of its external examiners to ensure that they understand and can fulfil their responsibilities. This should include a written briefing, for all of its examiners, on the institution's policies for assessment and external examining in general, together with appropriate specific course documentation.

External examining

9
At least one external examiner should be appointed for all educational programmes or parts of programmes that contribute to an award of an institution.

10
Institutions should discuss with their external examiners the evidence the examiner deems necessary to discharge his/her responsibilities.

11
in respect of collaborative provision, external examining procedures for programmes offered by a partner organisation should be the same as, or demonstrably equivalent to, those used by the awarding institution for its own programmes. The procedures should be clearly specified and documented, and rigorously and consistently applied.

External examiners' reports

12
Institutions should require external examiners to prepare at agreed times a written report that provides comments and judgements on the assessment process and the standards of student attainment.

13
Institutions should indicate the required form and coverage of external examiners' reports.

Use of external examiners' reports within the institution

14
Institutions should request that external examiners' reports are formally addressed to the head of the institution, or to specific individuals designated by the head of the institution to exercise responsibility for the handling of these reports. Institutions should ensure that the reports are considered within the institution at a senior level.

15
Full consideration should be given by the institution to comments and recommendations contained within the reports of external examiners, and the outcomes of the consideration, including actions taken, should be formally recorded.

Feedback to external examiners on their reports

16
Institutions should ensure that external examiners are, within a reasonable time, provided with a response to their comments and recommendations, including information on any actions taken by the institution.

Appendix 2

Membership of the working group for the *Code of practice: External examining*

Professor Sally Brown	Deputy Principal, University of Stirling
Professor James Calderhead	Dean of Access & Continuing Studies, University of Bath
Mr Peter Griffiths	Mead of Quality Development Centre, Cheltenham & Gloucester College of Higher Education
Professor Ian Haines	Dean of Faculty of Science, Computing & Engineering, University of North London
Dr John Hogan	Registrar, University of Durham
Mr Edward Landor	Director of Education & Training, RICS
Dr Bill Macmillan	Chair, Undergraduate Studies Committee, General Board of Faculties, University of Oxford
Dr Peter Milton	Director, Programme Review, QAA
Professor David Warren Piper	Dean, Academic Information Service, Southampton Institute
Mr Peter Williams (Chairman)	Director, Institutional Review, QAA
Professor Nick Harris (Deputy Chairman)	Assistant Director, Development, QAA
Mr Greg Wade	SCOP
Mr David Young	CVCP

Appendix 3

A note on the respective roles of external examiners and academic reviewers

Institutions' external examiners and the QAA's academic reviewers perform different roles as follows:

- external examining is part of an institution's student assessment processes: academic review has no part to play in the assessment of individual students;
- external examiners undertake a continuing engagement with the assessment of students for the period of their appointment: academic reviewers scrutinise the quality and standards of provision once every six years;
- external examiners are concerned with the standards set in a subject, and those achieved by particular students and groups of students, as described in this code: academic reviewers are concerned with the relationship between the institution's subject standards both set and achieved over a period of years, and national reference points such as subject benchmarks and levels of awards, and also with the match between the intended learning outcomes and the actual achievements of students;
- academic reviewers also scrutinise the effectiveness of the external examining process in meeting the expectations contained in the precepts contained in this code;
- academic reviewers will expect to see evidence of the general effectiveness of assessment procedures, including samples of students' work: they will not look at work currently subject to assessment, intervene in assessment procedures, re-mark assessments or query the judgements of external examiners in respect of individual students' marks or grades.

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Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and
standards in higher education

**Section 5: Academic appeals and student complaints
on academic matters - March 2000**

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Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education: Academic appeals and student complaints on academic matters

Foreword

1 This document is a code of practice for academic appeals and student complaints on academic matters. It is one of a suite of inter-related documents which, taken together, will form an overall *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* for the guidance of higher education institutions subscribing to the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (the QAA).

2 The overall *Code* and its constituent sections are being prepared by the QAA in response to the Reports of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education and its Scottish Committee (the 'Dearing' and 'Carrick' Reports) and to the consequent remodelling of the national arrangements for quality assurance in higher education. The completed *Code* will identify a comprehensive series of system-wide expectations covering matters relating to the management of academic quality and standards in higher education. In so doing, it will provide an authoritative reference point for institutions as they consciously, actively and systematically assure, the academic quality and standards of their programmes, awards and qualifications. The *Code* assumes that, taking into account nationally agreed principles and practices, each institution has its own systems for independent verification of its quality and standards and also of the effectiveness of its quality assurance systems. In developing the *Code*, extensive guidance is being sought from a range of knowledgeable practitioners.

3 Each section of the *Code* is being structured into a series of precepts and accompanying outline guidance. The precepts identify those key matters which the QAA expects an institution to be able to demonstrate it is addressing effectively through its own quality assurance mechanisms. The accompanying outline guidance is provided to assist institutions in maintaining and enhancing the quality of provision for students and other stakeholders. The guidance is not intended to be either prescriptive or exhaustive: its purpose is to offer a framework for quality assurance and control which institutions may wish to use, elaborate and adapt according to their own needs, traditions, cultures and decision-making processes. Nonetheless, in many institutions the guidance will constitute appropriate good practice. This is particularly the case in this section on academic complaints and appeals.

4 To assist users, the precepts are listed, without the associated guidance, in Appendix 1 to the code.

5 During the course of its quality assurance reviews, the QAA will consider the extent to which individual institutions are meeting the expectations of the precepts in sections of the *Code of practice*. The QAA will report on how effectively higher education institutions individually are meeting these expectations and are discharging their responsibilities for the academic standards and quality of their programmes and awards. In doing so it will focus on the precepts themselves, and not on the associated guidance: the latter may, however, provide a helpful starting point for discussion. The QAA expects that by May 2001 all institutions will be able to demonstrate that they are adhering to the precepts contained in this section of the *Code*.

Introduction

6 There is now a general and reasonable expectation that organisations providing services to the public should have effective systems for handling complaints. Students are entitled to no less effective a system to operate within higher education, than operates in other public services that they may use. This section of the QAA *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* is concerned with the ways in which institutions handle students' complaints about academic matters and also academic appeals. It has been drafted in the light of a number of other documents which have covered similar ground in recent years.

7 All these documents seek to reconcile the interests of students, staff and higher education institutions, while ensuring that wider expectations of fairness are met. They are concerned with both responsibilities and entitlements. For example, the entitlement of a student to raise a complaint has to be balanced by the legitimate requirement of an institution that its procedures should not be deliberately misused or its staff, or other students, abused.

8 Specific expectations about handling student complaints in higher education were set out in Recommendation 60 of the report of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (the Dearing Report). This recommended that arrangements for handling complaints from students should reflect the principles of natural justice; be transparent and timely; include procedures for reconciliation and arbitration; include an independent, external element; and be managed by a senior member of staff. Drafting of this section of the *Code* has taken account of both the specific recommendations of the Dearing Report, and the general expectations about complaints handling in public services which are promulgated by, for example, the Committee on Standards in Public Life and Service First. So far as the 'independent, external element' is concerned, the QAA has reluctantly decided that at present it is not possible to formulate appropriate precepts or guidance for inclusion in the code. Appendix 2 explains why this is and sets out more fully the QAA's position on the matter.

9 This section of the *Code* has been produced prior to the introduction of the Human Rights Act 1998 (HRA). It is not yet certain whether some or all higher education institutions are fully or partially included within the category of 'public authority' to which the Act applies. Whether, and if so to what extent, and how, the HRA applies to higher education institutions is a matter that can be determined only by the Courts through a case or cases testing the application of the Act. Such a determination could be some time away, and it would not be reasonable to delay promulgation of the code on account of a hypothetical future court case. However, it is the case that the law as it currently stands, whether through the HRA or other public or private law provisions, applies to the resolution of disputes involving students and their institutions. The QAA will keep the provisions of the code under review, and will amend them as necessary in the light of any definitive and applicable decisions of the Courts.

10 Higher education institutions cannot operate without a high level of goodwill and trust between staff and students. In the first instance difficulties and differences should

be approached with this in mind. If the use of a complaints procedure is seen to be common rather than a rather rare event, there may be a need for a more fundamental review of institutional relations and practices. As a general principle, recourse to complaints and appeals procedures should be necessary only as a last resort.

Nevertheless, institutions should ensure that complaints and appeals from students when they do arise, are handled through procedures that are clear, accessible, and applied consistently.

11 This code does not recommend a single right way in which higher education institutions should manage their student complaints and appeals processes. It does however, identify in its precepts the general or most basic features which it would expect any set of procedures to be able to demonstrate. In addition, adherence to the precepts will generally involve institutions in careful consideration of the points covered in the guidance notes. It is in this spirit that the notes are prefaced with the phrase "Institutions should...".

12 For the purpose of this code, a 'complaint' is defined as any specific concern about the provision of a programme of study or related academic service, and an 'appeal' is defined as a request for a review of a decision of an academic body charged with decisions on student progression, assessment, and awards. Because the QAA's remit is limited to matters of academic quality and standards, the code does not relate to non-academic complaints or appeals. Nevertheless, institutions will doubtless wish to ensure that there are no unjustifiable inconsistencies or incompatibilities between the way they deal with academic and non-academic complaints or appeals.

13 The absence of a complaints mechanism which can deal with academic matters when they arise may lead to an appeal in due course. It must however be emphasised that complaints are different in nature from appeals and this code assumes that institutions will have separate processes for dealing with them. Appeals are challenges by individuals to decisions that have been made and are by their nature more limited in their scope than complaints.

14 Because academic appeals are part of an institution's student assessment arrangements they are always likely to be dealt with in a formal way and their procedures and possible outcomes clearly framed in official regulations, codes or guidance documents. They may also be subject to a system of precedents, to ensure consistency of treatment. Complaints, by contrast, can be raised about a very wide range of events or activities and may involve single or multiple complainants. Complaint procedures therefore need to be flexible and responsive to ensure that a fair and just outcome is assured in each case.

15 In the interests of minimising the number of sections of the overall *Code of Practice*, the present code has been devised to cover both complaints and appeals. Where appropriate, precepts and guidance points which refer exclusively to appeals or to complaints are grouped and/or otherwise indicated. Where no indication is given, it should be assumed that the precepts or guidance are equally applicable to complaints and appeals procedures.

16 The five sections of the code provide a structure which highlights the main aspects of complaints and appeals procedures for higher education. These are:

- general principles;
- information;
- internal procedures;
- remedies;
- monitoring, evaluation and review.

The sections have been informed by an overriding preference for complaints and appeals to be resolved as close as possible to their point of origin, with a minimum of formality, but in a way which a disinterested observer would find reasonable in all the circumstances. Clearly, not every complaint or appeal can be resolved in a way which gives satisfaction to all parties. Nevertheless, procedures should be designed and implemented so that if there is a disappointment at an outcome it is not aggravated by dissatisfaction with a process. The question of the 'independent external element', which appeared as a sixth section in drafts of the code, and which is now omitted, is dealt with in Appendix 2.

17 This section of the *Code* has been prepared with the assistance of a working group representing all sectors of higher education. The members of the working group are listed in Appendix 3.

Note: 'Students' are defined here as persons registered or enrolled in an institution to follow a programme of study which may or may not lead to an award or qualification of that institution. It will be for the institution to determine and announce explicitly and regularly whether any of its students fall outside the terms of its complaints and appeals procedures (eg by virtue of their not being formal 'members' of the institution under the terms of its articles of governance, which may be the case in respect of students registered elsewhere for the institution's programme or award). Students following franchised or validated programmes, for example, may find themselves subject on the one hand to the academic appeals procedures of the body responsible for the award, but on the other hand to the complaints procedures of the institution where they are registered and pursuing their studies. The extent of jurisdiction will need to be made clear in relevant documents. Users are also recommended to refer to Section 2 of the *Code of Practice* which deals with collaborative provision.

Precepts and guidance

General principles

1

Institutions should have effective procedures for resolving student complaints and academic appeals. Students should have a full opportunity to raise, individually or collectively, matters of proper concern to them without fear of disadvantage and in the knowledge that privacy and confidentiality will be respected.

2

The procedures should be ratified by the governing body or other body with ultimate corporate responsibility and should form a part of the institution's overall framework for quality assurance.

3

Institutions should ensure that their procedures are fair and decisions are reasonable and have regard to any applicable law.

4

Institutions should address student complaints and appeals in a timely manner, using simple and transparent procedures. Informal resolution should be an option at all stages of the complaints procedure which should operate, in the first instance, at the level at which the matter arose.

Guidance/commentary

An institution should:

- define 'complaints' and 'appeals' in the context of its procedures;
- set out the scope of the procedures including, for example, formal and informal route(s) and their inter-relationship; and any special arrangements applying to particular groups of students, for example those engaged in research;
- set out the entitlements and responsibilities of the parties;
- explain the relationship, if any, between the procedures for complaints and appeals and other procedures such as those for disclosure in the public interest ('whistleblowing'), or harassment;
- facilitate access to information and documents material to a complaint or appeal; while having due regard to privacy, confidentiality and the reasonable interests of any relevant third parties;
- inform claimants that privacy and confidentiality will be assured unless disclosure is necessary to progress the complaint or appeal, in which case the claimant will be notified in advance of the disclosure;

- specify the time limits for each stage of the procedure, and the consequences if these are not met;
- ensure that the procedures are operated fairly and consistently, and in accordance with the equal opportunities policy of the institution;
- ensure that, in any collaborative arrangement with another institution, the respective jurisdictional authority of each institution in relation to student complaints and appeals is clearly defined. (See also the QAA *Code of practice: Section 2: Collaborative provision.*)

Information

5

Information on complaints and appeals procedures should be published, accurate, complete, clearly presented, readily accessible and issued to students and staff.

6

Sources of impartial help, advice, guidance and support should be advertised widely within the institution.

Guidance/commentary

An institution should:

- describe in simple and clear terms how a complaint or appeal will be handled; including information about deadlines for written representations, any provision for oral representations, and the significance of each stage of the proceedings in terms of the availability of any future review or appeal provided for by the institution;
- provide information to students on entry and remind them of it periodically;
- assure students that they will not be disadvantaged because they make a complaint or lodge an appeal in good faith;
- give contact details for any designated appeals/complaints officer; and sources of help available to complainants/appellants, including the students' union.

Internal processes

7

The complaints and appeals procedures should identify the persons or bodies from whom authoritative guidance may be sought on the applicability and operation of the procedures.

8

Those responding to, investigating or adjudicating upon complaints or appeals must, as required by law, do so impartially, and must not act in any matter in which they have a material interest or in which any potential conflict of interest might arise.

9

A complainant or appellant should be entitled to be accompanied at all stages of the complaints or appeals process by a person of his or her choosing.

10

The documentation should indicate what further internal procedures, if any, are open to a student dissatisfied with the response to a complaint or outcome of an appeal.

Guidance/commentary

An institution should:

in respect of both complaints and appeals

- ensure that staff generally are aware of the procedures and the circumstances in which they may be used, and that staff responsible for the procedures are fully competent in their operation;
- decide in what circumstances a student may be heard in person by an officer or committee determining their application;
- make clear the extent to which an accompanying person has a right to be heard;
- decide how it will deal with a complaint or appeal in the voluntary or unavoidable absence of an applicant, and whether or not it will permit a proxy to be nominated to represent the applicant;
- provide for applications judged to be vexatious or frivolous to be rejected, at the earliest possible time, with reasons given in writing to the student, as to why the application is an abuse of process;
- exercise its discretion so as not to strike out complaints or appeals solely because of minor procedural deficiencies in the application;

in respect of complaints

- provide for a formal written complaint:
 - i to be investigated by a designated member of staff, with no material interest in the complaint;
 - ii to receive a written response within a specified period of time; and
 - iii to be reviewed by a more senior member of staff should the student remain dissatisfied;
- exercise its discretion in determining whether, and if so how, anonymous or third party complaints will be considered;

in respect of appeals

- ensure that the grounds upon which an appeal may be brought are clearly set out;
- ensure that the grounds (if any) on which review of a first instance decision on an appeal may be sought are clearly set out;
- promulgate time limits for the notification of appeals and also for the submission of written representations in relation to examinations or other academic assessments;
- specify those matters that are not susceptible to review through the appeal procedure. These might include, for example:
 - i challenges to the academic judgements of examiners on an assessment outcome or the level of award recommended or granted*;
 - ii claiming that academic performance was adversely affected by factors such as ill-health, where there is no contemporaneous, independent, medical or other evidence to support the application;
- specify clearly the discretion remaining with examiners when a matter is remitted to them following a successful appeal;
- ensure that the University Senate, Academic Board or other similar body has an unambiguous power to annul a decision of the examiners and to substitute it with a decision of its own (normally following further advice from competent examiners), where circumstances make it appropriate for it to do so.

* Reference should also be made to precepts 11D and 11E, and associated guidance, in the QAA *Code of practice* on postgraduate research programmes.

Remedies

11

Institutions should ensure that where a complaint or appeal is upheld, appropriate remedial action is implemented.

12

Institutions should meet reasonable and proportionate incidental expenses necessarily incurred by a successful complainant or appellant.

Guidance/commentary

An institution should:

in respect of both complaints and appeals

- make clear to complainants, and those seeking review of academic decisions, any limitations or restrictions on the respective powers of officers and committees in relation to the grant of redress;
- ensure that the remedy is implemented speedily, including any decision to meet reasonable and proportionate incidental expenses of the successful complainant or appellant;
- inform the complainant or appellant of the outcome and any remedial action taken.

in respect of constraints

- recognise formally that many complaints can be resolved at the point at which they arise, by the member of staff concerned;
- empower designated staff to make decisions on redress in all appropriate complaints cases, in order to avoid protracted disputes;
- recognise that remedies available in respect of complaints might include adjustment of decisions affecting academic progress or award, financial compensation, disciplinary action against a member, or members, of staff, or a combination of these;
- invite complainants to indicate at the outset the form of remedy they are seeking, without prejudice to the final remedy determined.

Monitoring, evaluation and review

13

Institutions should have in place effective arrangements for the regular monitoring, evaluation and review of complaints and appeals.

14

Institutions should keep their monitoring, evaluation and review arrangements under scrutiny, taking into account current good practice.

Guidance/commentary

An institution should:

- have a reliable system of record keeping that tracks formal complaints and appeals and provides accurate information about the whole institution;
- ensure that the monitoring arrangements record:
 - i the nature of the complaint or appeal;
 - ii how the matter was dealt with, and the time taken for each stage;
 - iii the outcome of the complaint or appeal;
 - iv ethnic origin and gender of applicants, and all such data required by the equal opportunities policy of the institution that the applicants have disclosed for this purpose;
- ensure that review and evaluation encompass the monitoring activities and also the:
 - i adequacy of advice, guidance and support mechanisms for students;
 - ii adequacy of staff development and support for those operating complaints and review procedures;
 - iii level of understanding amongst staff and students of the procedures;
 - iv effectiveness of the overall procedures in meeting their stated aims.
- ensure that monitoring and evaluation procedures take full account of the normal schedule of review and evaluation cycles so that information about complaints and appeals can inform such activities as course design or postgraduate supervision;
- seek the participation of the relevant student and staff representative organisations in the review and evaluation process;
- identify any structural changes required to the complaints and appeals procedures as a result of review and evaluation;

- ensure that any common causes of those complaints and appeals upheld are rectified, and the performance of the institution over time, with regard to patterns of complaints and appeals, is kept under review;
- keep under review the implications of changes in legislation for complaints and appeals procedures;
- report regularly to the governing body, Senate, Academic Board, or other bodies with appropriate corporate responsibilities, on the outcomes of the monitoring and evaluation processes.

Appendix 1

The precepts

General principles

1

Institutions should have effective procedures for resolving student complaints and academic appeals. Students should have a full opportunity to raise, individually or collectively, matters of proper concern to them without fear of disadvantage and in the knowledge that privacy and confidentiality will be respected.

2

The procedures should be ratified by the governing body or other body with ultimate corporate responsibility and should form a part of the institution's overall framework for quality assurance.

3

Institutions should ensure that their procedures are fair and decisions are reasonable and have regard to any applicable law.

4

Institutions should address student complaints and appeals in a timely manner, using simple and transparent procedures. Informal resolution should be an option at all stages of the complaints procedure which should operate, in the first instance, at the level at which the matter arose.

Information

5

Information on complaints and appeals procedures should be published, accurate, complete, clearly presented, readily accessible and issued to students and staff.

6

Sources of impartial help, advice, guidance and support should be advertised widely within the institution.

Internal processes

7

The complaints and appeals procedures should identify the persons or bodies from whom authoritative guidance may be sought on the applicability and operation of the procedures.

8

Those responding to, investigating or adjudicating upon complaints or appeals must, as required by law, do so impartially, and must not act in any matter in which they have a material interest or in which any potential conflict of interest might arise.

9

A complainant or appellant should be entitled to be accompanied at all stages of the complaints or appeals process by a person of his or her choosing.

10

The documentation should indicate what further internal procedures, if any, are open to a student dissatisfied with the response to a complaint or outcome of an appeal.

Remedies

11

Institutions should ensure that where a complaint or appeal is upheld, appropriate remedial action is implemented.

12

Institutions should meet reasonable and proportionate incidental expenses necessarily incurred by a successful complainant or appellant.

Monitoring, evaluation and review

13

Institutions should have in place effective arrangements for the regular monitoring, evaluation and review of complaints and appeals.

14

Institutions should keep their monitoring, evaluation and review arrangements under scrutiny, taking into account current good practice.

Appendix 2**Independent, external review of students' complaints**

The Report of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (the Dearing Report) expressed the concern that students' complaints should, and should be seen to be taken seriously. The Report said:

'When the internal procedures within an institution are exhausted, the student should have access to an independent individual not involved in the original decision, who can review the way the case has been handled and, in non-academic matters, the decision that has been taken. Where the complaint is particularly serious, the independent individual should be drawn from outside the institution.'

The formal recommendation of the Report was that arrangements made by institutions for handling complaints from students should ensure that:

'they reflect the principles of natural justice; they are transparent and timely; they include procedures for reconciliation and arbitration; they include an independent, external element; and they are managed by a senior member of staff.' (Recommendation 60)

The QAA has been guided by the terms of the recommendation in preparing the section of its *Code of practice* dealing with student complaints and appeals. The QAA welcomes the support for the principle of an independent appeal stage from the bodies representing higher education institutions. To reflect fully the Dearing Report recommendation, the QAA would have wished to include precepts in the following terms:

- where the internal procedures within an institution are exhausted, and the student remains dissatisfied, the student should have access to an independent person or body with no prior involvement in the case, who can review the way in which the case has been handled and, except where an academic appeal is concerned, the decision that has been taken;
- institutions should ensure that all parties fully understand, before the start of any independent external review, the status of the review's findings and the extent to which any finding is, or is not, to be binding upon the parties;
- the independent person or body should be drawn from outside the institution;
- each party should have direct access to the independent person or body;
- the independent person or body should give reasons for their decision.

These precepts have not been included in the code, at the present time because of legal difficulties that some institutions would face in binding themselves to accept the outcome of independent review, and difficulties in reconciling such arrangements with the jurisdiction of the Visitor.

Consideration of the issues

The QAA has taken legal advice on the question of whether an institution constituted as a higher education corporation may agree to be bound by independent, external review of its decisions, other than by way of judicial review. The Courts have held higher education corporations to be public institutions, discharging public functions. Principles of public law mean that a public body cannot delegate matters for which it has no power to delegate, it cannot abnegate its decision making powers to outside bodies, it cannot fetter its own discretion. It would be improper for an authority to delegate wide discretionary powers to another authority over which it is incapable of exercising direct control, unless it is expressly empowered so to delegate.

For a higher education corporation to implement the arrangements for independent, external review envisaged in the above precepts, it would have to seek an amendment to its articles of government to provide the appropriate power. Such amendments are a matter for the Privy Council, which is advised on these matters by the relevant Government education department. It is reasonable to assume that Government would wish to take a view on the way in which such powers might be exercised, before recommending a series of similar amendments to the Privy Council. It is reasonable to expect that such powers might be exercised through procedures that are broadly comparable across institutions.

in those chartered universities with a Visitor, the Visitor is clearly both independent and external to the university. in general, the Government departments or other offices that provide support to Visitors are not resourced to cope with any significant volume of complaints. in some cases, matters are processed expeditiously, in others there are criticisms concerning, for the most part, matters of procedure and delay. Review of the Visitor system is desirable, with the aim of ensuring that all individuals and holders of offices appointed as Visitors are able to deal with matters coming before them timeously, and through due process.

It would be possible for precepts to be drafted that did not fully meet the expectations of the Dearing recommendation. For chartered institutions with Visitors, this would involve accepting that the existing Visitor system met any reasonable expectation of effectiveness. For higher education corporations this would mean inserting the independent review stage to come before the final stage in an institution's internal process.

The QAA supports the Dearing recommendation, and notes that it was endorsed by Government. Accordingly, it does not think it right to propose arrangements that fall short of the recommendation. Equally, it would be unhelpful to promulgate precepts that institutions may not yet have competence to implement.

Review of the Visitor system, and general amendment of articles of government to provide for an independent, external element, raise similar issues about resourcing and due process. The QAA believes that Government should consider, with bodies representing higher education institutions, as a matter of public policy:

- the nature of amendments to the articles of government of higher education corporations, that would be appropriate to give effect to the Dearing recommendation; and
- the extent to which Visitorial arrangements may require reform If they are to be an effective means of providing an independent, external element in student complaints procedures, which meets the standards of due process set out in Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

in the light of any such consideration, the QAA will review this code, with a view to including precepts similar to those set out above. in the meantime, the QAA hopes that those institutions that do not have an independent, external element in their procedures, and which have no constitutional barrier to the introduction of one, will consider introducing such an element.

Appendix 3

The working group

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Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality
and standards in higher education

Section 6: Assessment of students - May 2000

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Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education: Assessment of students

Foreword

1 This document is a code of practice for the assessment of students in UK higher education institutions. It is one of a suite of inter-related documents which, taken together, will form an overall *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* for the guidance of higher education institutions subscribing to the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (the QAA).

2 The overall *Code* and its constituent sections are being prepared by the QAA in response both to the Reports of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education and its Scottish Committee (the 'Dealing' and 'Garrick' Reports) and the consequent remodelling of the national arrangements for quality assurance in higher education. The completed *Code* will identify a comprehensive series of system-wide expectations covering matters relating to the management of academic quality and standards in higher education. In so doing, it will provide an authoritative reference point for institutions as they consciously, actively and systematically assure the academic quality and standards of their programmes, awards and qualifications. The *Code* assumes that, taking into account nationally agreed principles and practices, each institution has its own systems for independent verification both of its quality and standards and of the effectiveness of its quality assurance systems. In developing the *Code*, extensive advice is being sought from a range of knowledgeable practitioners.

3 Each section of the *Code* is structured into a series of precepts and accompanying outline guidance. The precepts identify those key matters that the QAA expects an institution to be able to demonstrate it is addressing effectively through its own quality assurance mechanisms. The accompanying outline guidance is provided to assist institutions in maintaining and enhancing the quality of provision for students and other stakeholders. The guidance is not intended to be either prescriptive or exhaustive: its purpose is to offer a framework for quality assurance and control which institutions may wish to use and adapt according to their own needs, traditions, cultures and decision-making processes. Nonetheless, in many institutions the guidance will constitute appropriate good practice.

4 To assist users, the precepts are listed, without the associated guidance, in Appendix 1 to code.

5 During the course of its quality assurance reviews, the QAA will consider the extent to which individual institutions are meeting the expectations of the precepts in the available sections of the *Code of practice*. The QAA will report on how effectively higher education institutions individually are meeting these expectations and are discharging their responsibilities for the academic standards and quality of their programmes and awards. In doing so it will focus on the precepts themselves, and not on the associated guidance: the latter may, however, provide a helpful starting point for discussion. The QAA expects that by autumn 2001 all institutions will be able to demonstrate that they are adhering to the precepts.

Introduction

6 Assessment is a generic term for a set of processes that measure the outcomes of students' learning, in terms of knowledge acquired, understanding developed, and skills gained. It serves many purposes. Assessment provides the means by which students are graded, passed or fail. It provides the basis for decisions on whether a student is ready to proceed, to qualify for an award or to demonstrate competence to practise. It enables students to obtain feedback on their learning and helps them improve their performance. It enables staff to evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching.

7 Assessment plays a significant role in the learning experience of students. It determines their progression through their programmes and enables them to demonstrate that they have achieved the intended learning outcomes. It is assessment that provides the main basis for public recognition of achievement, through the awarding of qualifications and/or credit.

8 Assessment is usually construed as being either *diagnostic*, *formative* or *summative*.

9 Commonly held understandings of these terms are that:

- *diagnostic assessment* provides an indicator of a learner's aptitude and preparedness for a programme of study and identifies possible learning problems;
- *formative assessment* is designed to provide learners with feedback on progress and inform development, but does not contribute to the overall assessment;
- *summative assessment* provides a measure of achievement or failure made in respect of a learner's performance in relation to the intended learning outcomes of the programme of study.

10 Any assessment instrument can, and often does, involve more than one of these elements. So, for example, much coursework is formative in that it provides an opportunity for students to be given feedback on their level of attainment, but also often counts towards the credit being accumulated for a summative statement of achievement. An end-of-module or end-of-programme examination is designed primarily to result in a summative judgement on the level of attainment the student has reached. Both formative and summative assessment can have a diagnostic function. Assessment primarily aimed at diagnosis is intrinsically formative, though it might, rarely, contribute towards a summative judgement.

11 This section of the *Code of practice* assumes that these understandings of the nature and purpose of assessment are broadly accepted and implemented by higher education institutions. It is not the QAA's intention to prescribe specific ways of implementing the precepts set out below. It is equivalence of effect that will be looked for. The guidelines that accompany the precepts suggest possible ways of meeting the precepts but these are neither prescriptive nor exhaustive. The QAA wishes to encourage innovation and diversity in assessment practices.

12 in implementing this code institutions will also need to refer to other sections of the *Code of practice*, in particular:

- student complaints and appeals;
- students with disabilities;
- postgraduate research programmes;
- external examining;
- programme approval, monitoring and review;

and also:

- The guidelines on the quality assurance of distance learning;
- The guidelines for programme specification.

Precepts and guidance

General principles

1

As bodies responsible for academic standards, institutions should have effective procedures for:

- i) designing, approving, supervising and reviewing the assessment strategies for programmes and awards;
- ii) the consistent implementation of rigorous assessment practices which ensure that the academic/professional standard for each award and award element is set and maintained at the appropriate level and that student performance is properly judged against this.

in considering how their own policies and practices reflect this precept, institutions will need to consider, in addition to their own policies, the implications of the introduction in UK higher education of subject benchmark statements and the national qualifications frameworks.

in particular, institutions will wish to ensure that:

- assessment tasks and associated criteria are effective in measuring student attainment of the intended learning outcomes;
- assessment policies and practices are responsive and provide for the effective monitoring of the validity, equity and reliability of assessment.

2

The principles, procedures and processes of all assessment should be explicit, valid, and reliable.

Forms of assessment vary widely. However, in designing and operating their assessment processes, institutions will wish to consider:

- how to make information and guidance on assessment clear, accurate, consistent and accessible to all staff, students, placement or practice assessors and external examiners*;
- the range and types of assessments used and how these measure appropriately the achievement by students of those skills, areas of knowledge and attributes identified as intended learning outcomes for the module or programme, and allow the strengths and weaknesses of the students to be demonstrated;
- how to ensure that assessment is operated fairly within programmes, and that the principles for assessment are applied consistently across the institution;

*A note on information that institutions might consider publishing appears in Appendix 2.

- how the reliability of assessment is demonstrated (for example, the consistent use of agreed marking and grading schemes, and moderation arrangements);
- the robustness of arrangements to monitor, evaluate and demonstrate the fairness of assessments.

3

Institutions should have effective mechanisms to deal with breaches of assessment regulations, and the resolution of appeals against assessment decisions.

While appeals cannot normally be made against academic judgements, institutions will wish to consider:

- how concerns about unfair operation of assessment procedures are dealt with and the types of evidence normally required to investigate such matters.

Additionally, institutions will wish to consider how students are provided with information and guidance on their responsibilities within the assessment process including, for example:

- definitions of academic misconduct in respect of assessment, such as plagiarism, collusion, cheating, impersonation and the use of inadmissible material (including material downloaded from electronic sources such as the internet);
- accepted and acceptable forms of academic referencing and citation;
- the consequences and penalties incurred by late or non submission of material for assessment.

Assessment panels and boards

4

Institutions should implement effective, clear, and consistent policies in respect of the membership, procedures, powers and accountability of assessment panels and boards of examiners. Where there is more than one such body the relative powers of each should be defined.

in constituting such bodies institutions should consider:

- under what exceptional circumstances internal assessors and/or examiners would not be expected to attend the assessment panels or examiners' meetings that consider their assessments;
- whether to include on final assessment panels and boards of examiners at least one internal member from the institution who is independent of the academic unit operating the assessment-

- a requirement for members of assessment panels and boards of examiners to declare personal interest, involvement or relationship with a student being assessed;
- the minimum number of internal and external members who must be present for valid decisions to be taken;
- what student work should be available to meetings of the assessment panels and boards of examiners;
- the extent of any discretion that may be exercised in relation to students whose assessment performance might have been adversely affected by extenuating circumstances;
- the keeping of appropriate records of the procedures and decisions of each assessment panel and board of examiners.

(See also the QAA's *Code of practice* on external examining.)

Conduct of assessment

5

Institutions should ensure that assessment is conducted with rigour and fairness and with due regard for security.

in addressing this precept institutions will need to consider:

- the publication of clear rules and regulations governing the conduct of assessment including deadlines for submission of assessed work;
- measures to prevent fraudulent activities including impersonation and the submission of work that is not that of the student in work submitted for assessment;
- proper and rigorous invigilation of assessments, including rules and guidelines for invigilators;
- any special measures that may be necessary for the assessment of materials based on work placements or periods of study abroad;
- procedures for retention by the institution of assessed work for a defined period of time.

(See also the QAA's *Code of practice* on collaborative provision and *Guidelines on distance learning*.)

Scheduling and amount of assessment

6

Institutions should ensure that the scheduling and amount of assessment are consistent with an effective and appropriate measurement of the achievement by students of the intended learning outcomes and that they effectively support learning.

in observing this precept institutions will need to consider:

- the proper and sensible links between the organisation of the curriculum, its staged delivery through teaching and learning sessions, the specified learning outcomes identified and the appropriate scheduling of assessment;
- how assessment supports student learning;
- the exercise of due economy in the number of assessment tasks, and the possible advantages of combining the assessment of a number of cognate modules so as to avoid assessment overload;
- ensuring students have adequate time to reflect on learning before being assessed.

Marking and grading

7

Institutions should publish, and implement consistently, clear criteria for the marking and grading of assessments.

8

Institutions should ensure that there are robust mechanisms for marking and for the moderation of marks.

Precepts and guidance relating to external scrutiny and moderation of marking are to be found in the QAA's *Code of practice: External examining*. In so far as mechanisms for marking and internal moderation are concerned, in developing its policies and procedures institutions will wish to consider, for example:

- the range of guides for marking and grading that are used throughout and within the institution;
- the benefits and limitations of marking systems that mask the identity of the candidate from markers and/or examiners;
- the use, where appropriate, of second marking, including the reliability of methods used for the sampling of assessments from larger groups;
- the rules governing any internal moderation of marks;
- undertaking an analysis of marking and grading trends to facilitate comparisons and provide evidence on standards.

9

Institutions should evaluate periodically the maintenance and development of their academic standards.

Institutions should consider:

- maintaining and using an archive of sample marked scripts in all subject areas;
- analysing trends in results to identify, for example, the relation between student entry qualifications and assessment outcomes; and the evaluation and comparison of the distribution of marks, grades or honours classes.

10

Institutions should publish clear criteria for the aggregation of marks and grades and the rules and regulations for progression, final awards and classifications.

11

Institutions should ensure that where they practise compensation and/or condonation (cononement) the regulations are clear and consistent and their application does not jeopardise the integrity of awards and standards.

Institutions should give consideration to:

- the basis on which component marks, or other assessment outcomes are to be aggregated for the purposes of progression, award and classification;
- the need to ensure that the outcomes of aggregation procedures are statistically valid;
- whether compensation for, and condonation of, failure, should be allowed, particularly within credit-based systems;
- the number and timing of retakes that are permissible;
- how award and classification borderlines are defined and dealt with;
- policies on re-submission of assessed work and the resitting of examinations;
- rules on deferring assessment, together with any special assessment conditions or penalties that may apply, including any restriction on the marks, grades or levels of awards that can be obtained on the basis of retaken or deferred assessments.

Feedback to students on performance

12

Institutions should ensure that appropriate feedback is provided to students on assessed work in a way that promotes learning and facilitates improvement.

in meeting the needs of students for feedback on their progress and attainment, institutions will need to consider:

- the timeliness of feedback;
- specifying the nature and extent of feedback that students can expect in relation to particular types and units of assessment, and whether this is to be accompanied by the return of assessed work;
- the effective use of comments on returned work, including relating feedback to assessment criteria, in order to help students identify areas for improvement as well as commending them for evident achievement;
- the role of oral feedback, either on a group or individual basis as a means of supplementing written feedback;
- when feedback may not be appropriate.

Staff development and training

13

Institutions should ensure that all staff involved in the assessment of students are competent to undertake their roles and responsibilities.

Institutions should consider how staff development can:

- promote understanding of the theory and practice of assessment and its implementation in the institution;
- enable staff to learn about new approaches to assessment as well as the best ways to operate existing or traditional methods;
- provide induction on assessment practices for new staff and those with new responsibilities;
- meet the training needs of administrative staff involved in assessment procedures and processes

Language of assessment

14

The languages of assessment and teaching will normally be the same. If, for any reason, this cannot be achieved, institutions must ensure that their academic standards are not consequently put at risk.

Institutions subject to the requirements of the *Welsh Language Act (1993)*, and those involved with overseas provision in which assessments might be conducted in a language(s) other than that not used for teaching and study, should publish:

- procedures for the consideration of students' requests for assessment to be undertaken in a language not used for teaching, including the time at which such requests should be made;
- the criteria to be used when considering how to respond to such requests.

in determining their criteria institutions will need to consider:

- how persons with the necessary expertise in the appropriate language(s), subject knowledge and assessment methods will be identified and employed;
- how suitable external examiners fluent in the relevant language(s) will be identified, appointed and involved with the assessment process;
- If translation can not be avoided, how the reliability and validity of the assessment judgement arising from the marking of translated assessments will be assured.

(See also the QAA codes of practice on students with disabilities and collaborative provision).

Professional and accreditation body requirements

15

Institutions should ensure that where a programme forms part of the qualifications regime of a professional or statutory body, clear information is available to staff and students about specific assessment requirements that must be met for progression towards the professional qualification.

Institutions should ensure that there is clear information available about:

- which options or modules must be passed to meet the requirements of the body;
- the level at which the programme, or any part of it, must be passed to meet the requirements of the body.

Review of regulations

16

Institutions should have effective mechanisms for the review and development of assessment regulations.

Institutions should consider:

- how proposed changes are discussed with staff, students and external examiners.

in developing and implementing such mechanisms institutions will need to consider:

- the frequency and processes for review of their assessment regulations;
- procedures that involve any appropriate staff, students, external examiners and participating individuals or bodies in the review and discussion of proposed developments and changes;
- the procedures and time scale for enacting any changes to assessment regulations.

Recording, documentation and publication of assessment decisions

17

Institutions should ensure that assessment decisions are recorded and documented accurately and systematically.

18

Institutions should ensure that the decisions of relevant examination boards are published as quickly as possible, consistent with rigour of assessment and accuracy.

Institutions will wish to consider providing:

- clear statements of the responsibilities of all those involved in computation, checking and recording of assessment decisions;
- systems for back-up when using electronic storage or transmission of assessment data;
- clear policies on access to information on assessment judgements about individuals.

Appendix 1

The precepts

(Note: the precepts are printed here without the guidance notes for ease of reference.)

General principles

1

As bodies responsible for academic standards, institutions should have effective procedures **for**:

- i) designing, approving, supervising and reviewing the assessment strategies for programmes and awards;
- ii) the consistent implementation of rigorous assessment practices which ensure that the academic/professional standard for each award and award element is set and maintained at the appropriate level and that student performance is properly judged against this.

2

The principles, procedures and processes of all assessment should be explicit, valid, and reliable.

3

Institutions should have effective mechanisms to deal with breaches **of** assessment regulations, and the resolution of appeals against assessment decisions.

Assessment panels and boards

4

Institutions should implement effective, clear, and consistent policies in respect **of** the membership, procedures, powers and accountability of assessment panels and boards of examiners. Where there is more than one such body the relative powers of each should be defined.

Conduct of assessment

5

Institutions should ensure that assessment is conducted with rigour and fairness and with due regard for security.

Scheduling and amount of assessment**6**

Institutions should ensure that the scheduling and amount of assessment are consistent with an effective and appropriate measurement of the achievement by students of the intended learning outcomes and that they effectively support learning.

Marking and grading**7**

Institutions should publish, and implement consistently, clear criteria for the marking and grading of assessments.

8

Institutions should ensure that there are robust mechanisms for marking and for the moderation of marks.

9

Institutions should evaluate periodically the maintenance and development of their academic standards.

10

Institutions should publish clear criteria for the aggregation of marks and grades and the rules and regulations for progression, final awards and classifications.

11

Institutions should ensure that where they practise compensation and/or condonation (condonement) the regulations are clear and consistent and their application does not jeopardise the integrity of awards and standards.

Feedback to students on performance**12**

Institutions should ensure that appropriate feedback is provided to students on assessed work in a way that promotes learning and facilitates improvement.

Staff development and training**13**

Institutions should ensure that all staff involved in the assessment of students are competent to undertake their roles and responsibilities.

Language of assessment**14**

The languages of assessment and teaching will normally be the same. If, for any reason, this cannot be achieved, institutions must ensure that their academic standards are not consequently put at risk.

Professional and accreditation body requirements**15**

Institutions should ensure that where a programme forms part of the qualifications regime of a professional or statutory body, clear information is available to staff and students about specific assessment requirements that must be met for progression towards the professional qualification.

Review of regulations**16**

Institutions should have effective mechanisms for the review and development of assessment regulations.

Recording, documentation and publication of assessment decisions**17**

Institutions should ensure that assessment decisions are recorded and documented accurately and systematically.

18

Institutions should ensure that the decisions of relevant examination boards are published as quickly as possible, consistent with rigour of assessment and accuracy.

Appendix 2

A guidance note on published assessment information

The following list is illustrative of the type of information that institutions should consider including in their published documentation:

- the purpose, methods and schedule of assessment tasks during, and at the end of, a module or programme of study;
- any role played by Accreditation of Prior (Experiential) Learning and the processes involved;
- the criteria for assessment including, where appropriate, descriptors of expected standards of student attainment: what is expected in order to pass or to gain a particular grade or classification;
- what elements will, and which will not, count towards interim or final assessment and with what weighting or exemption procedures;
- the marking and grading conventions that will be used;
- the consequences of assessment, such as decisions about progression to the next level, final awards and the right of appeal;
- how and when assessment judgements are published;
- any opportunities for re-assessment.

Appendix 3

Acknowledgement

The QAA would like to thank all those higher education institutions, numerous individuals and other stakeholders who provided comments on this code. With the help of so many constructive and thoughtful contributions it was possible to make significant improvements to the code prior to publication.

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Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and
standards in higher education

Section 7: Programme approval, monitoring and review - May 2000

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Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education: Programme approval, monitoring and review

Foreword

1 This document is a code of practice for programme approval, monitoring and review in UK higher education institutions. It is one of a suite of inter-related documents which, taken together, will form an overall *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* for the guidance of higher education institutions subscribing to the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (the QAA).

2 The overall *Code* and its constituent sections are being prepared by the QAA in response both to the Reports of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education and its Scottish Committee (the 'Dearing' and 'Garrick' Reports) and the consequent remodelling of the national arrangements for quality assurance in higher education. The completed *Code* will identify a comprehensive series of system-wide expectations covering matters relating to the management of academic quality and standards in higher education. In so doing, it will provide an authoritative reference point for institutions as they consciously, actively and systematically assure the academic quality and standards of their programmes, awards and qualifications. The *Code* will assume that, taking into account nationally agreed principles and practices, each institution has its own systems for independent verification both of its quality and standards and also of the effectiveness of its quality assurance systems. In developing the *Code*, extensive advice is being sought from a range of knowledgeable practitioners.

3 Each section of the *Code* is structured into a series of precepts and accompanying outline guidance. The precepts identify those key matters which the QAA expects an institution to be able to demonstrate it is addressing effectively through its own quality assurance mechanisms. The accompanying outline guidance is provided to assist institutions in maintaining and enhancing the quality of provision for Students and other stakeholders. The guidance is not intended to be either prescriptive or exhaustive: its purpose is to offer a framework for quality assurance and control which institutions may wish to use, elaborate and adapt according to their own needs, traditions, cultures and decision-making processes. Nonetheless, in many institutions the guidance will constitute appropriate good practice.

4 To assist users, the precepts are listed, without the associated guidance, in Appendix 1 to the code.

5 During the course of its quality assurance reviews, the QAA will consider the extent to which individual institutions are meeting the expectations of the precepts in the available sections of the *Code of practice*. The QAA will report on how effectively higher education institutions individually are meeting these expectations

and are discharging their responsibilities for the academic standards and quality of their programmes and awards. In doing so it will focus on the precepts themselves, and not on the associated guidance: the latter may, however, provide a helpful starting point for discussion. The QAA expects that by autumn 2001 all institutions will be able to demonstrate that they are adhering to the precepts contained in this section of the *Code*.

Introduction

6 Formal and effective procedures should exist in all institutions for:

- the approval of programmes of study;
- the subsequent monitoring of their effectiveness in achieving stated aims and the success of students in attaining the stated, intended learning outcomes;
- the review of the continuing validity of those aims and outcomes.

7 This section of the *Code of practice* provides a set of precepts, with accompanying guidance, on the arrangements for programme approval, monitoring and review. All institutions should consider when developing and reviewing their procedures. For the purpose of this code a programme is defined as an approved curriculum followed by a registered student. This will normally be a named award route that leads to the intended learning outcomes in the relevant programme specification. Programmes may be offered at different levels within a single subject. A programme may be multi-disciplinary, for example a joint honours degree or a combined honours degree. The term programme may also refer to the main pathways through a modular scheme, which may itself include several subjects.

8 In many institutions programmes are constructed from individual units, or modules, which have their own outcomes. The principles of design, approval, monitoring and review that are set out in this section of the *Code of practice* may, where appropriate, be applied equally to such units or modules. In those cases where a modular programme may be negotiated by an individual student, with guidance and agreement from the institution, the design principles in particular should inform the policies and procedures within which such negotiation takes place.

9 Academic programmes fulfil a range of purposes including the provision of a general academic experience, preparation for knowledge creation and research, preparation for specific (often professional) employment or for general employment, or as preparation for lifelong learning. Understanding and defining the balance of purposes is important in order to design a curriculum and to provide the related learning experiences that will enable the stated intended learning outcomes to be achieved. Institutions should aim to design and deliver programmes that reflect current knowledge and best practice and meet with the requirements of the student target group and the goals and strategic plans of the institution.

10 The rationale underlying this code is that programme design, approval and review are linked, and that the processes involved need to be seen in a holistic and integrated manner. Good programme design creates programmes that deliver the intended learning outcomes and required standards and should be a fundamental consideration when institutions approve new programmes or review the

effectiveness of existing provision. Where practices for the initial approval of programmes are rigorous and effective, subsequent monitoring and review is likely to be relatively straightforward. Duplication of effort and documentation can be reduced. If the requirements of external bodies, such as professional and statutory bodies and the QAA, are taken into account when programmes are approved, monitored and reviewed.

11 Also underpinning this code is the notion that standards, quality and the means for quality enhancement need to be "designed in" to programmes from the outset. If this is done properly the tasks facing review bodies in terms of evaluating the extent to which intended learning outcomes are being met, and standards attained, are that much clearer and easier.

12 Course design is a creative, and often innovative activity. The processes used by institutions to approve and review academic programmes should foster creativity, and encourage a culture of continuous enhancement of provision.

13 An institution seeking to align its own monitoring and reviews with those undertaken by the QAA might wish to consider the extent to which it is addressing for itself the questions which academic reviewers will be asking. These questions are listed in Appendix 3. The *Handbook for academic review* includes these questions together with commentary and full information about the review method.

14 An institution might wish to consider whether reports produced as a result of monitoring and/or review activities should be presented in a way that would facilitate the production of a self-evaluation document of the type that will inform the academic review process. Institutions should refer to the 'Guidelines for producing self-evaluation documents for subject review' which are Annex C of the *Handbook for academic review*.

General precepts

1

Institutions should ensure that their responsibilities for standards and quality are discharged effectively through their procedures for:

- the design of programmes;
- the approval of programmes;
- the monitoring and review of programmes.

in evaluating the effectiveness of their policies and practices for programme design, approval and review against this precept institutions will need to consider whether due account is taken of:

- external reference points, including any relevant subject benchmark statements, national qualifications frameworks for higher education and, where appropriate, the requirements of professional and statutory bodies and employers;
- the compatibility of programme proposals and developments with institutional goals and mission;
- strategic academic and resource planning;
- existing provision within the institution.

2

Institutions should ensure that the overriding responsibility of the academic authority (eg senate or academic board) to set, maintain and assure standards is respected and that any delegation of power by the academic authority to approve or review programmes is properly defined and exercised.

Institutions should ensure that:

- the respective roles, responsibilities and authority of different bodies involved in programme approval and review are clearly defined;
- the operation of any delegated power is monitored and reviewed.

3

Institutions should ensure that the approval and review of programmes involves appropriate persons who are external to the design and delivery of the programme. Such contributions should be sought in a way that will promote confidence that the standards and quality of the programmes are appropriate.

Institutions should consider the contributions that could be made by, for example:

- academic peers from other disciplines within the institution;

- external advisers who provide relevant information and guidance on current developments in the work place and/or in the discipline(s);
- any programme partners, for example institutions with which there are collaborative arrangements;
- appropriate professional or statutory bodies.

4

Approval and review processes should be clearly described and communicated to those who are involved with them.

Institutions will wish to consider:

- publishing clear principles and procedures for the approval and review of programmes that are available to all staff and students in the institution and to external participants in the processes;
- how the different stages of approval and review are clearly stated and the roles and responsibilities of participants clearly defined;
- defining clearly the responsibility for initiating the process of primary consideration, monitoring and review of programmes;
- how staff development strategies and activities may include the dissemination of good practice in relation to programme design, approval and review.

Programme design

5

Institutions should publish guidance, for use within the institution, on principles to be considered when programmes are designed.

Institutions might include in such guidance the need for the programme design process to consider:

- the institution's goal and mission;
- the intended aims of the programme;
- the level of the programme - its intellectual challenge and value - and its place in a national qualifications framework;
- external reference points, including any relevant subject benchmark statements, national qualifications frameworks for higher education and, where appropriate, the requirements of professional and statutory bodies and employers;
- the concept of progression so that the curriculum imposes an increasing level of demand on the learner during the course of the programme';

'See Appendix 2 for an explanation of 'level'.

- opportunities potentially available to students on completion of a programme;
- the balance of the programme, for example in relation to academic and practical elements, personal development and academic outcomes, breadth and depth in the curriculum;
- the coherence of the programme to ensure that the overall experience of a student has a logic and an intellectual integrity that are related to clearly defined purposes;
- the award title to ensure it reflects the intended learning outcomes of the programme;
- how the intended learning outcomes of the programme will be promoted, demonstrated and assessed;
- the resources necessary and available to support the programme.

Where a programme is individually negotiated, the guidance given to the student by the institution to support the process should be consistent with that used for institution-designed programmes.

A set of criteria for programme design, which institutions might find helpful to consider when determining their own guidance, is described briefly in Appendix 2. It is relevant to all programmes but may be of particular help to demonstrate that standards are appropriately established for inter-disciplinary and innovative programmes for which there are not directly relevant subject specific external reference points.

Programme approval

6

Institutions should ensure that programme approval decisions are informed by full consideration of academic standards and the quality of the learning opportunities. The final decision to approve a programme should be taken by the academic authority, or a body acting on its behalf. The body should be independent of the academic department, or other unit that will offer the programme, and have access to any necessary specialist advice.

in the course of the approval process consideration should be given to:

- the design principles underpinning the programme being considered;
- the definition and appropriateness of standards in accordance with the level and title of the award;
- the resources needed and available to support the programme;
- anticipated demand for the programme;

- monitoring and review arrangements for the programme;
- the length of time for which approval is granted;
- the contents of the programme specification.

Programme monitoring and review

Institutions should consider the appropriate balance between regular monitoring and periodic review of programmes. Monitoring should consider the effectiveness of the programme in achieving its stated aims, and the success of students in attaining the intended learning outcomes. Periodically, the continuing validity of those aims and outcomes themselves should be reviewed. In general, monitoring is an activity likely to be undertaken within the providing department. Review will normally be an institutional process, often involving external participants of high calibre and academic/professional credibility.

7

Institutions should monitor the effectiveness of their programmes:

- to ensure that programmes remain current and valid in the light of developing knowledge in the discipline, and practice in its application;
- to evaluate the extent to which the intended learning outcomes are being attained by students;
- to evaluate the continuing effectiveness of the curriculum and of assessment in relation to the intended learning outcomes;
- to ensure that appropriate actions are taken to remedy any identified shortcomings.

8

Institutions should periodically review the continuing validity and relevance of programme aims and intended learning outcomes.

Monitoring activity, which will often be driven by the programme team appraising its own performance at the end of each academic year, may consider, for example:

- external examiners' reports;
- any reports from accrediting or other external bodies;
- staff and student feedback;
- feedback from former students and their employers;
- student progress information.

Any identified need for change should be recorded and responsibilities for implementing the changes identified. The interests of current students should be protected by acting promptly to remedy any deficiencies. Any staff development needs should be addressed.

The timing and nature of reviews of overall aims and outcomes will depend on a number of factors, including the rate of development of knowledge and practice in the discipline, the extent to which wider questions of overall aims are dealt with in regular monitoring, and overall institutional policy on such reviews.

When reviewing the extent to which the original programme aims and intended outcomes remain appropriate, consideration might include, for example:

- the cumulative effect of changes made over time, as a result of regular monitoring, to the design and operation of the programme;
- current research and practice in the application of knowledge in the relevant discipline(s), technological advances, and developments in teaching and learning;
- changes to external points of reference, such as subject benchmark statements, relevant professional or statutory body requirements;
- changes in student demand, employer expectations and employment opportunities;
- the achievements of student cohorts.

in the event of a decision to significantly change or discontinue a programme, consideration must be given to the measures that should be taken to notify and protect the interests of students registered for, or accepted for admission to, the programme.

9

Institutions should evaluate the effectiveness of programme approval, monitoring and review practices.

Institutions will wish to consider:

- the benefits gained by the institution, staff, students and other stakeholders from approval, monitoring and review activities undertaken;
- how the processes promote enhancement and disseminate good practice;
- opportunities to make approval and review practices more effective and efficient.

Appendix 1

The precepts

General precepts

1

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- the design of programmes;
- the approval of programmes;
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Institutions should ensure that the approval and review of programmes involves appropriate persons who are external to the design and delivery of the programme. Such contributions should be sought in a way that will promote confidence that the standards and quality of the programmes are appropriate.

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Programme monitoring and review

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- to ensure that appropriate actions are taken to remedy any identified shortcomings.

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Institutions should periodically review the continuing validity and relevance of programme aims and intended learning outcomes.

9

Institutions should evaluate the effectiveness of programme approval, monitoring and review practices.

Appendix 2

This appendix does not form part of the Code of practice: programme approval, monitoring and review. It is included to assist institutions determining their own guidance on programme design.

Design criteria

The following items may be regarded as a starting point for reflection on approaches to programme design. They are intended to assist institutions develop their own guidance which will promote good practice in the design of programmes to ensure that standards are set appropriately and intended learning outcomes specified accordingly.

Level

Consideration should be given to the level of a programme and to the level of the stated intended learning outcomes at any named stages in the programme. A level is an indicator of the relative demand, complexity, depth of study and learner autonomy involved in a programme. Various systems are currently in use to identify levels, including descriptors indicating the intellectual and skill attainment expected of students. The introduction of the national qualifications frameworks will assist institutions to define the level of their programmes.

Progression

Consideration should be given to the way in which the curriculum promotes an organised progression so that the demands on the learner in intellectual challenge, skills, knowledge, conceptualisation and learning autonomy increase.

Balance

Consideration should be given to the balance within the programme of a number of elements, typically academic and practical elements, a concern for personal development and academic outcomes and a determination of breadth and depth of the subject material to be included in the programme.

Flexibility

The range of requirements of learners likely to enter the programme should be considered.

Coherence

Consideration should be given to the overall coherence and intellectual integrity of the programme. The programme should be designed in a way that will ensure the student's experience has a logic and integrity that are clearly linked to the purpose of the programme.

Integrity

The expectations given to student and others about the intended learning outcomes of the programme should be honest and deliverable. Consideration should be given to the feasibility of attainment of the outcomes.

Reference points

Internal and external points of reference should be used to inform the design of the programme. External reference points might be provided by a subject benchmark statement, information about similar or parallel programmes elsewhere or expectations of professional or statutory regulatory bodies, or employer expectations (for example, as set out in occupational standards). In a student negotiated programme, an inherent part of the negotiation process will involve the student and tutor in designing the programme, taking into consideration the intended level of the award and jointly agreeing the relevant sources of reference.

Appendix 3

This appendix is not part of the Code of practice. It is included to assist institutions that wish to align internal reviews with external reviews.

Academic review

The key questions that will be considered by academic reviewers when reviewing subjects as part of the QAA's academic review activities are listed below. The questions have been included as an appendix to this code to assist institutions who seek to align their internal monitoring and review activities with those undertaken by the QAA. The code does not require that institutions use the questions as a framework for internal reviews - institutions will wish to determine their own approaches - but institutions might find it helpful to consider the questions as they reflect on their practices.

Evaluation of the intended learning outcomes in relation to external reference points and to the broad aims of the provision

- 1 What are the intended learning outcomes for a programme?
- 2 How do they relate to external reference points including relevant subject benchmark statements, the qualifications framework and any professional body requirements?
- 3 How do they relate to the overall aims of the provision as stated by the subject provider?
- 4 Are they appropriate to the aims?

The means by which the subject provider designs curricula that permit achievement of the intended outcomes

- 5 How does the provider ensure that curriculum content enable students to achieve the intended learning outcomes?
- 6 How does the provider ensure that the design and organisation of the curriculum is effective in promoting student learning and achievement of the intended learning outcomes?

The means by which the intended outcomes are communicated to students, staff and external examiners

- 7 How are the intended outcomes of a programme and its constituent parts communicated to staff, students and external examiners?
- 8 Do the students know what is expected of them?

Evaluation of the means by which the subject provider creates the conditions for achievement of the intended learning outcomes

- 9 Do the design and content of the curricula encourage achievement of the intended learning outcomes in terms of knowledge and understanding, cognitive skills, subject specific skills (including practical/professional skills), transferable skills, progression to employment and/or further study, and personal development?
- 10 Is there evidence that curricular content and design is informed by recent developments in techniques of teaching and learning, by current research and scholarship, and by any changes in relevant occupational or professional requirements?

Evaluation of the assessment process and the standard it demonstrates

- 11 Does the assessment process enable learners to demonstrate achievement of the intended outcomes?
- 12 Are there criteria that enable internal and external examiners to distinguish between different categories of achievement?
- 13 Can there be full confidence in the security and integrity of assessment procedures?
- 14 Does the assessment strategy have an adequate formative function in developing student abilities?
- 15 What evidence is there that the standards achieved by learners meet the minimum expectations for the award, as measured against relevant subject benchmarks and the qualifications framework?

Evaluation of the institution's approaches to reviewing and improving the standards achieved

- 16 How does the subject provider review and seek to enhance standards?

Evaluation of the quality of the learning opportunities offered by the subject provider: the teaching delivered by staff and how it leads to learning by students

- 17 How effective is teaching in relation to curriculum content and programme aims?
- 18 How effectively do staff draw upon their research, scholarship or professional activity to inform their teaching?
- 19 How good are the materials provided to support learning?
- 20 Is there effective engagement with and participation by students?

- 21 Is the quality of teaching maintained and enhanced through effective staff development, peer review of teaching, integration of part-time and visiting staff, effective team teaching and induction and mentoring of new staff?

- 22 How effectively is learning facilitated in terms of student workloads?

Student progression and academic support

- 23 Is there an appropriate overall strategy for academic support, including written guidance, which is consistent with the student profile and the overall aims of the provision?
- 24 Are there effective arrangements for admission and induction which are generally understood by staff and applicants?
- 25 How effectively is learning facilitated by academic guidance, feedback and supervisory arrangements?
- 26 Are the arrangements for academic tutorial support clear and generally understood by staff and students?

Learning resources and their deployment

- 27 Is the collective expertise of the academic staff suitable and available for effective delivery of the curricula, for the overall teaching, learning and assessment strategy and for the achievement of the intended learning outcomes?
- 28 Are appropriate staff development opportunities available?
- 29 Is appropriate technical and administrative support available?
- 30 Is there an overall strategy for the deployment of learning resources?
- 31 How effectively is learning facilitated in terms of the provision of resources?
- 32 Is suitable teaching and learning accommodation available?
- 33 Are the subject book and periodical stocks appropriate and accessible?
- 34 Are suitable equipment and appropriate IT facilities available to learners?



Appendix 4

This code of practice on programme approval, monitoring and review was drafted with the direct assistance of a number of individuals from a range of higher education institutions. The design criteria set out in Appendix 2 were developed by a sector-wide Advisory Group on Multidisciplinary and Modular Provision which reported to the QAA in November 1999.

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