

UKDS Response to Consultation on proposed UK Code of Practice for standards, quality and enhancement in higher education

Consultation question 1

For the purposes of the UK Code of Practice for standards, quality and enhancement, the following definitions will apply:

☐ **Threshold academic standards** are the level of achievement that a student has to reach to gain an academic award. For similar awards, the threshold level of achievement should be the same across the UK.

☐ **Academic quality** is a way of describing how well the learning opportunities available to students are managed to help them to achieve their award. It is about making sure that appropriate and effective teaching, support, assessment and learning opportunities are provided for them.

Are these the appropriate definitions?

The definitions are broadly appropriate.

The increasing complexity of modular schemes and the flexible and permissive algorithms that are used to decide the pass/fail threshold for an award and for degree classification (both at undergraduate and postgraduate - where merit/distinction grades are often used) is making it extremely difficult to ensure true comparability across the sector. It is essential that these decisions are made with the active participation of discipline-specific external examiners who are often now only permitted to comment on individual module results.

Consultation question 2:

Do you agree that the components of the Academic Infrastructure should be restructured into the UK Code of Practice for standards, quality and enhancement?

Will the new Code of Practice make clear the distinction between standards and quality?

The restructuring should be helpful and has the potential to be more easily understood. It might be helpful if, as the document is put together, some editing of all sections is carried out to make even clearer the distinction between standards and quality.

Consultation question 3:

The two areas highlighted for future work are the status of credit frameworks and provision of information at programme level. Do you agree that these should be priorities for future work? Do you agree that in due course the Code of Practice should include a Part C on Information?

We are not wholly convinced that the credit framework is a priority. The provision of information is an important issue and it is hoped that such a section can be written in such a way that it is not over-prescriptive and encourages the use of material that is prepared for, and supplied to, students as a matter of course. However, this is the area that most concerns us.

In the consultation document QAA indicated that it appreciated that UK higher education providers are currently operating in a period of financial restraint and uncertainty. Science subjects with their hierarchical structures and in most cases very resource-intensive practical work are very demanding on staff who also have heavy pressures to obtain research funding and deliver substantial research outputs. We had hoped that QAA would see this revision of the Academic Infrastructure as an opportunity to reduce the amount of guidance, rather than to merely re-organise, without significant change, the academic infrastructure and then add a further section. We would strongly urge that some attention is given to how the total size of the new code can be reduced.

Consultation question 4:

Will the UK Code of Practice make clear how UK higher education providers set and maintain threshold academic standards and assure and enhance academic quality?

Is the name 'UK Code of Practice for standards, quality and enhancement in higher education' appropriate?

It is probable that the new code will manage to describe how HEIs might set and maintain standards.

The title of the code is appropriate, and we are pleased to see that “standards” is given first place ahead of quality and enhancement.

This response from: UK Deans of Science

This response was prepared following discussion at an Executive Committee meeting of UKDS.

The UK Deans of Science (UKDS) was formed in 1989 at a meeting in London. It has members from a full range of UK higher education institutions. Membership is open to Universities and other Higher Education Institutions in the UK that have a science base - normally interpreted as having a combined total of more than 500 undergraduate and postgraduate science students. In this context

science is interpreted widely to include the obvious “traditional” sciences and mathematics as well as health, sports and medicinal sciences, environmental and forensic sciences, psychology, etc. Its individual members (usually formally designated as Deans) are responsible for science in HEIs across the UK and generally hold the budgets for science, including any research budgets.

For any queries regarding this response please contact Prof Ian Haines, (i.haines@btopenworld .com)

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