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Mapping Against the UK Quality Code

SECTION 4: COURSE DESIGN & DEVELOPMENT

Academic Services | Quality & Policy
academicservices@abdn.ac.uk

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INTRODUCTION

The Quality Code is split into 12 themes, available online on the QAA website at <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code>. As part of this, *Course Design and Development* is vital for upholding academic standards. In any Higher Education institution, the courses that are provided for students to learn and engage with must be of an appropriate standard, with relevant, engaging and accessible content and adequate assessments. The code describes this theme as:

This Theme aims to support UK higher education providers in meeting their responsibilities for the academic standards and quality of learning opportunities of the courses they offer and the credit and qualifications they award, within the context of their own mission, values and strategic objectives. Responsibility for setting and maintaining standards and quality lies with the degree-awarding body. This Theme is relevant to any delivery organisation(s) with which a provider may work.

In addition to the responsibility for the quality of learning opportunities of the courses they offer, providers can use course design and development to facilitate a culture of innovation, creativity and continuous improvement through the creation of unique and market-attractive portfolios. It can be informed by feedback from a range of stakeholders/sources and developments. It can reflect multidisciplinary research, contemporary industry practice, pedagogical and technological advancements, and current affairs.

In practical terms, the *Course Design and Development* theme focuses on the educational innovations and accessibility of any given course, while ensuring high and competent academic standards. Courses can be designed by academic staff and enhanced by the various academic support teams to enhance the offering in a course.

In defining key terms that will be used frequently in this section, the Quality Code notes the following:

Course: An approved pathway of study that provides a coherent learning experience and normally leads towards a qualification. UK higher education courses must be approved by UK degree-awarding bodies. They might also be referred to as programmes, units or modules.

Approval: The formal endorsement of a pathway of study by a UK degree-awarding body.

Key Stakeholders: Those who are vital to the course design and development process, such as students, academics and professional staff.

External stakeholders: Those involved in the course design and development process who are external to the provider such as employers and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs).

Credit: A means of calculating and recognising learning, used by most higher education providers, expressed as numbers of credits at a specific level of study and used for the purpose of certification.

SECTION 4: COURSE DESIGN & DEVELOPMENT

The Quality Code has three different sections: the expectations for standards; the expectations for quality; and the guiding principles. The relevant expectations for standards and quality are detailed below. The Guiding Principles are mapped to the University's own policies, procedures and quality mechanisms. There are two separate sections for the University's practices, detailing what the University does and has in place to support that expectation/principle, as well as the supporting documentation, which includes reference to supporting policy, procedure, website or other document.

EXPECTATIONS FOR STANDARDS & CORE/COMMON PRACTICES	EXPECTATIONS FOR QUALITY & CORE/COMMON PRACTICES
The academic standards of courses meet the requirements of the relevant national qualifications framework.	Courses are well-designed, provide a high-quality academic experience for all students and enable a student's achievement to be reliably assessed.
The value of qualifications awarded to students at the point of qualification and over time is in line with sector-recognised standards.	The provider designs and/or delivers high-quality courses.
The provider ensures that the threshold standards for its qualifications are consistent with the relevant national qualifications frameworks.	The provider has sufficient appropriately qualified and skilled staff to deliver a high-quality academic experience.
The provider ensures that the threshold standards for its qualifications are consistent with the relevant national qualifications frameworks.	The provider has sufficient and appropriate facilities, learning resources and student support services to deliver a high-quality academic experience.
Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the standards of its awards are credible and secure irrespective of where or how courses are delivered or who delivers them.	Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the academic experience is high-quality irrespective of where or how courses are delivered and who delivers them.
The provider uses external expertise, assessment and classification processes that are reliable, fair and transparent.	The provider reviews its core practices for quality regularly and uses the outcomes to drive improvement and enhancement.
The provider reviews its core practices for standards regularly and uses the outcomes to drive improvement and enhancement.	The provider engages students individually and collectively in the development, assurance and enhancement of the quality of their educational experience.

QUALITY CODE PRINCIPLES	UNIVERSITY PRACTICES	SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION
GUIDING PRINCIPLES		
1. Strategic oversight ensures that course design, development and approval processes and	The Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) has oversight for quality assurance and enhancement activities across the University. It is chaired by the Dean for Quality Assurance and Enhancement, who has senior oversight of all quality matters, including curriculum management.	Course and Programme Approval (Webpage) Quality Assurance Committee (Webpage) Setting up a Partnership (Webpage)

outcomes remain consistent and transparent.

As well as assuring the standards and quality of their courses, providers ensure that their academic portfolio is reflective of their mission and strategic objectives. Strategic oversight enables providers to set clear direction and promote a shared understanding of the processes for, and outcomes of, course design, development and approval. It enables providers to oversee the integration of the academic and business aspects of course approval in an objective manner.

Minutes and agendas are publicised on the University website, available to all staff and students.

Business cases for new programmes and stand-alone short courses, as well as withdrawals, are considered via the Programme Management Committee prior to approval by the Quality Assurance Committee (see below). This allows strategic oversight at University-level of all proposals made by Schools for the introduction of new programmes and stand-alone short courses and for withdrawals. The PMC involves colleagues across the University, such as marketing, recruitment and academic services alongside senior academic colleagues ensuring there is full and informed consideration of all proposals.

The University has a robust system for the quality assurance approval of all programme and course proposals (new, amended and withdrawn) which is overseen by the Quality Assurance Committee. Following business case approval, where required, proposals for new courses and amendments to existing courses are submitted by Schools via the University's Curriculum Management System (CMS). Information sought at course level includes detailed information on intended learning outcomes and linkage to assessment. At a programme level, proposals are scrutinised to ensure appropriate reference has been made to subject benchmarks and other appropriate external frameworks. Proposals are reviewed by members of the Quality Assurance Committee and, where necessary, active dialogue between the QAC representative and the School is used to resolve any queries. Through the CMS, other professional service departments, such as Timetabling and Marketing, are able to access information submitted and use this to inform their operational activities.

The University requires that provision delivered in collaboration with a partner institution must be at least as rigorous as those for the University's internal provision. This is assured as part of a comprehensive process for scrutinising the establishment and ongoing maintenance of partnerships. All proposals for student-related partnerships are reviewed through the Quality Assurance Committee as part of the approach to assure the academic quality of such partnerships. There are two separate

	<p>procedures, depending on the type of partnership that is proposed, and the perceived risks associated with the partnership. Higher levels of risk are managed through higher levels of scrutiny at all stages of the process i.e. establishment of the partnership through to ongoing operation and monitoring. For our Transnational Education partnerships in Qatar and the Joint Institute, scrutiny of business cases for programme approval is also undertaken at the relevant joint committees.</p>	
<p>2. Accessible and flexible processes for course design, development and approval facilitate continuous improvement of provision and are proportionate to risk.</p> <p>Course design and development processes should be straightforward and tailored to the perceived level of risk. This encourages constructive engagement from staff, students and other stakeholders, and supports the continuous improvement of courses. Engagement can be effectively supported by providing accessible information, which details key steps, timescales, roles and responsibilities, and links to external/internal reference materials.</p>	<p>All information related to course design and approvals are available on the University webpages. The Academic Quality Handbook is a virtual tool for all staff to access with details of all policies and procedures for all education provision, including course design, delivery and approvals.</p> <p>The Centre for Academic Development offers flexible opportunities to engage with course design principles through its range of workshops and accredited programmes. An initial introduction is included as part of two-day teaching and learning induction for new academic staff. The web page on ‘Design, Deliver and Evaluate your Teaching’ provides a comprehensive starting point for staff on areas to consider in developing new courses.</p> <p>For those developing fully online programmes, courses or CPD, resources and support are available to aid staff in carefully planning their provision to ensure it meets the needs of the fully online learner. As part of this process, the Centre for Academic Development (CAD) provides support with programme review and storyboarding. This process involves a supported discussion to explore aims, learning outcomes and assessment and leads to the development of a well-structured plan for each course. Similarly, CAD is also able to provide storyboarding support to Schools for on campus provision.</p> <p>During Covid, institutional blended learning principles were established to support academic colleagues in delivering teaching, learning and assessment in a blended way. These Principles were supported by comprehensive tools, examples and inspiration to help staff. Guidance on accessibility and inclusivity in teaching was also provided.</p>	<p>Course and Programme Approval (Webpage) Quality Assurance Committee (Webpage) Design, Delivery, Evaluate your Teaching (Webpage) Online Development Steps (Webpage) Principles and Guidance for Blended Learning</p>

<p>3. Internal guidance and external reference points are used in course design, development and approval.</p> <p>The credibility of courses is anchored in recognised national and European frameworks, applicable PSRB requirements and degree-level Apprenticeship Standards. These reference points help to maintain sector recognised standards by offering consistency across the range of provision. Providers also develop and use internal guidance against which courses are designed, developed and approved.</p>	<p>The University programme proposal forms for QAC require that internal and external points of reference must be used to inform the design of programmes. Reference points include national subject benchmark statements, information about similar or parallel programmes elsewhere and within the University, expectations of Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies, and employer input. Through the Curriculum Management System, details of all external reference points used to inform programme and course design are collected. This information is considered as part of the approval process by the Quality Assurance Committee.</p> <p>External Examiners provide Schools with further valuable external reference in regard to the comparability of provision to that of other institutions. They also provide valuable insight into the alignment of programmes and courses to external reference points. This advice is used to inform course design and development.</p> <p>Programme Advisory Boards (PABs) enable discussion between Schools and employers regarding proposed new programmes and courses and enable proposals being made to be informed by employer insight.</p>	<p>Subject Benchmark Statements (Webpage) External Examining (Webpage) Programme Advisory Board (Webpage)</p>
<p>4. Feedback from internal and external stakeholders is used to inform course content.</p> <p>Continuous engagement with internal and external stakeholders such as students, academic colleagues from other providers, employers and professional bodies informs the design and development of courses, ensuring the continuing relevance of curricula, assessment methods and teaching approaches. Within their own context, a provider might consider how stakeholder input is gathered and integrated as part of the core process. The nature and extent of external</p>	<p>All courses and programmes are monitored annually through the University's Annual Course and Programme Review procedures. These procedures draw upon a range of feedback to inform the process of review including student feedback through the course feedback form, Staff-Student Liaison Committee meetings, feedback from External Examiners, Programme Advisory Boards and Professional Statutory and Regulatory Bodies together with analysis of course data and feedback from the course delivery team and input from class representatives. While Schools manage the Annual Course Review process reviewing these internally, all forms are submitted to the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) and these are sampled by QAC. Annual Programme Reviews are submitted by Schools to QAC and are discussed with Schools with any policy issues being referred to relevant committees for consideration, as appropriate.</p> <p>In the design of courses, External Examiner feedback is taken into consideration, as well as input from Professional, Statutory and</p>	<p>Annual Course and Programme Review (Webpage) Internal Teaching Review (Webpage) Course and Programme Approvals (Webpage) Student Feedback (Webpage) Course Evaluation (Webpage) Class Representation (Webpage) Programme Advisory Board (Webpage) Education Committee Composition (Webpage) Quality Assurance Committee Composition (Webpage)</p>

<p>input should be proportionate to the stage of the process, the decision being taken and the level of risk associated with the development.</p>	<p>Regulatory Bodies and Programme Advisory Boards, which include industry experts and employers. This external stakeholder input ensures content remains relevant and appropriate.</p> <p>In the design and delivery of all the University's courses, student feedback plays a large role in the assurance of quality and standards, and includes both informal and formal mechanisms for providing such feedback. Feedback is then used in the improvement of the University experience for students. Feedback is gathered through discussion at Staff-Student Liaison Committees, through the University's Course Feedback Forms or more informally through focus groups, mid-term student feedback or other means. As noted above, this feedback informs the Annual Course and Programme Review process and may initiate amendment to courses and programmes.</p> <p>The University places strong emphasis on the involvement of students on committees and in decision making. Each School has an Aberdeen University Students' Association elected School Convener who is the lead student representative for each School. They work closely with the elected class representatives to feed any concerns about courses and programmes to the School. The School Convener (or other student representative) attends School-level committees (e.g. School Education Committee) where they are able to contribute to discussions around future courses and programmes, policy matters, feedback (e.g. NSS results) and other matters. At a University level, AUSA representatives are also full members of all Education committees including the University Education Committee and the Quality Assurance Committee along with Senate which is the University's main academic decision-making body.</p>	
<p>5. Development of staff, students and other participants enables effective engagement with the course design, development and approval processes. Providers determine the criteria which underpin effective course</p>	<p>The Centre for Academic Development (CAD) runs courses designed for staff in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education. These courses focus on a range of topics and provide development opportunities for new or early-career staff to enhance their knowledge-base and skills. These courses cover topics including curriculum design, assessment, feedback, learning outcomes, blended learning and accessibility and inclusion. Furthermore, there are professional qualifications that staff can undertake which are accredited by AdvanceHE.</p>	<p>Learning & Teaching in Higher Education Course (Webpage) Course and Programme Design and Planning (Webpage) Accredited Professional Development (Webpage)</p>

<p>design within their organisational context, including how the criteria are reflected in the course. To achieve desired outcomes and to use collective expertise, providers should support those involved. Internal and external stakeholders require clear information and guidance, and those new to these processes will need appropriate support to facilitate their contribution.</p>	<p>CAD also run sessions for new academic staff on course and programme design and planning at the University. These sessions give staff an overview and understanding of the processes involved, and expectations on, designing and delivering courses at the University.</p> <p>CAD have a dedicated team whose role is to support educational development and innovation. The team has played a prominent role in the support and development of staff, and of course delivery, in the context of Covid-19 and the move to blended learning.</p> <p>Guidance and support for those completing new course and programme proposal forms through the Curriculum Management System is embedded within the forms together with links to further external resources.</p> <p>The involvement of colleagues from across the University, and at various levels, in the Programme Management Committee and the Quality Assurance Committee ensures there is full and informed consideration of all proposals and that any colleagues new to the approval process are supported in the development of their knowledge and expertise in this area.</p>	
<p>6. Course design, development and approval processes result in definitive course documents.</p> <p>Approval processes should ensure that definitive course documentation is produced accurately and fairly describing the learning opportunities, intended student outcomes and support offered. Providers are responsible and accountable for the information they produce and for ensuring definitive course documentation remains current, transparent, focused on the</p>	<p>The Centre for Academic Development (CAD) provides a wide range of courses, events and accredited programmes. It is mandatory for new academic staff to attend the two-day Learning & Teaching in HE course which is specifically tailored for staff new to teaching at the University of Aberdeen and includes guidance on course design and development.</p> <p>Online resources are available for both new and existing staff which introduces them to course and programme design and planning. PGR students have online resources tailored to support them with tutorials and in their role acting as demonstrators in lab classes. The Centre for Academic Development has dedicated staff who can support staff with course and programme design on a one-to-one basis.</p>	<p><u>Learning & Teaching in Higher Education Course (Webpage)</u> <u>Accredited Professional Development (Webpage)</u> <u>Course and Programme Design and Planning (Webpage)</u></p>

<p>intended audiences and complies with any external or legal requirements.</p>	<p>The Curriculum Management System (CMS) ensures that there is a single central repository for documentation relating to all courses and programmes. Information to populate various institutional publications originates from the CMS ensuring consistent information is available to all. New and updated information is submitted and maintained through the CMS and scrutinised as part of the quality assurance process therein.</p> <p>Once designed, courses are passed to the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) for approval. In scrutinising course and programme proposal forms (new and amended) in the CMS the appropriateness, accuracy and compliance with external frameworks is ensured. QAC's review also includes consideration of the assessments as well as the Intended Learning Outcomes to ensure consistency in the approach.</p> <p>The Annual Course and Programme Review processes require the currency of courses and programmes to be examined and updated as appropriate.</p>	
<p>7. Design, development and approval processes are reviewed and enhanced.</p> <p>Providers ensure that course design, development and approval processes remain effective and continue to contribute to the enhancement of the provision offered (see also Monitoring and Evaluation Theme). In evaluating processes, providers may draw upon a wide range of evidence including feedback from academic staff, professional services, students and external stakeholders. There are also opportunities to identify and benchmark against sector best practice.</p>	<p>The University uses a variety of review mechanisms to drive improvement and enhancement to the quality of the services we provide. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy Review: Each year, a selection of Education policies are revisited and reviewed, ensuring practices are consistent, effective and up-to-date. As part of this rolling process, procedures for course design, development and approval are reviewed. • Internal Teaching Review (ITR): Our ITR process enables a holistic review of an academic School's education provision providing a focus both on quality assurance and enhancement. Through the process engagement from academic staff, support staff and students (undergraduate, postgraduate taught and research) is enabled ensuring that there is wide input into the discussions and recommendations. • Annual Course & Programme Review: These processes aim to examine the effectiveness of our courses and programmes: to ensure that they remain current and valid in 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 	<p>Annual Course and Programme Review (Webpage) Internal Teaching Review (Webpage) Enhancement Themes (Webpage) Course Evaluation (Webpage) Class Representation (Webpage)</p>

students; to evaluate the continuing effectiveness of the curriculum and of assessment in relation to the intended learning outcomes; and to ensure that recommendations for appropriate actions are followed up to remedy any identified shortcomings and to monitor and review the student experience. Both ACR and APR are informed by feedback drawn from a range of stakeholders (see 4 above).

- **Quality Enhancement Themes:** The Enhancement Themes encourage academic and support staff, and students collectively to share current good practice and to generate ideas and models for innovation in learning and teaching. The University has an active Community of Practice which aims to enable the dissemination of good practice.

The continuing development and rollout of the functionality of our Curriculum Management System (CMS) is part of our ongoing programme system enhancements ensuring our systems remain fit for purpose and aligned to policy requirements.

Student feedback is actively encouraged and there are a variety of mechanisms for students to provide feedback to the University on any aspect of their student and academic experience. Feedback mechanisms include the Class Representative system and Staff-Student Liaison Committees, as well as through the University's Course Evaluation Form process and more informal means of gathering feedback. This feedback plays a role in the quality assurance of our provision and in informing course and programme enhancements. Changes made in response to feedback are captured within the CMS. The reasons for change are stored as part of the change request.