



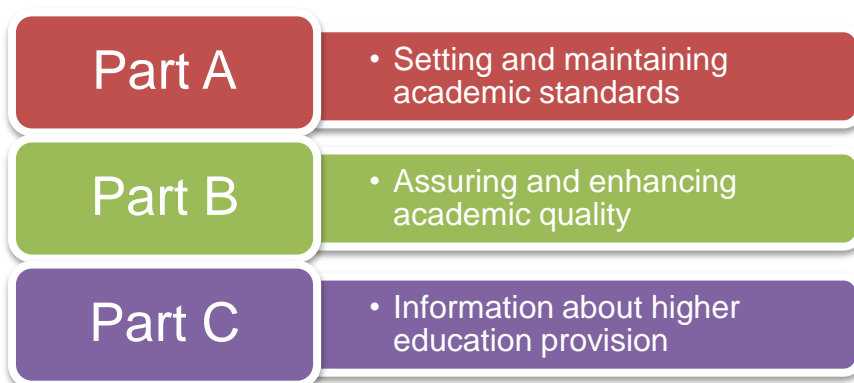
# **A brief guide to the UK Quality Code and its implementation at Oxford**

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All universities in the UK are responsible for setting and maintaining the *standards* of their academic awards and ensuring the *quality* of the learning opportunities in place for their students. As a condition of receiving public funding, universities are expected to meet a number of baseline regulatory requirements, one of which is represented by a series of 19 nationally agreed *Expectations* contained within the [UK Quality Code](#). Expectations are defined as expressing key matters of principle that the higher education sector has identified as essential for assuring academic standards and quality. They make clear what all UK higher education providers are required to do, what they should expect of themselves and each other, and what students and the general public can therefore expect of all providers.

The Expectations are distributed through the three parts of the Quality Code. The more abstract Expectations contained in Part A are deliberately repeated and expanded upon in Part B.



In the Quality Code, each Expectation is accompanied by a number of *Indicators of sound practice* and a commentary. The Indicators are not a check-list but are there to help institutions reflect how they might meet the relevant Expectations. As long as an institution can show that it meets the overarching Expectation, it is not necessary that it does so using the approach given in every Indicator. This permits for a significant element of flexibility, and is intended to allow for the unique needs, traditions, cultures and decision-making processes of each organisation.

It is the responsibility of the senior decision-making bodies of the University, principally Education Committee reporting to Council, to ensure that the University has a policy and regulatory framework in place which meet the Expectations. Academic divisions may make more detailed policy provisions within this framework where local need arises. Departments and faculties are responsible for the day-to-day implementation of this policy and regulatory framework in how they manage courses and interact with students.

This guide seeks to explain the Expectations in the context of the collegiate University and links with the more practical guidance contained within each division's [Quality assurance \(QA\) calendar](#). Each section of this guide starts with the Expectation (in '**bold**') and a summary of the material in that chapter of the Quality Code. This is followed by a description of how the Expectation is implemented through the University's policies, practices and processes and how it is reflected in the relevant parts of the QA calendar.

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## Part A Setting and maintaining academic standards

### A1 UK and European reference points for academic standards

*'In order to secure threshold academic standards, degree-awarding bodies:*

- a) ***ensure that the requirements of The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) are met by:***
  - ***positioning their qualifications at the appropriate level of the FHEQ ;***
  - ***ensuring that programme learning outcomes align with the relevant qualification descriptor in the relevant FHEQ ;***
  - ***naming qualifications in accordance with the titling conventions specified in the FHEQ***
  - ***awarding qualifications to mark the achievement of positively defined programme learning outcomes;***
- b) ***consider and take account of QAA's guidance on qualification characteristics***
- c) ***where they award UK credit, assign credit values and design programmes that align with the specifications of the relevant national credit framework.***
- d) ***consider and take account of relevant subject benchmark statements.'***

The Expectation in chapter A1 of the Quality Code sets out the widely accepted external reference points for establishing and maintaining degree award standards. Those with responsibility for quality assurance are expected to be familiar with the following definitions and documentation:

- threshold academic standards – the minimum level of achievement which a student must reach to be awarded the qualification concerned;
- learning outcomes – the specific areas of knowledge, understanding and competence which a student must be able to demonstrate as a result of taking the course<sup>1</sup>;
- qualification descriptors – the particular academic characteristics which are deemed to underpin the level of a course at bachelor's, master's, or doctoral level;
- the [Framework for Higher Education Qualifications](#) (FHEQ 2014);
- [subject benchmark statements](#) – descriptions of the broad range of knowledge, understanding and competence expected in a discipline at undergraduate and (for some disciplines) at master's level.

#### **How this is implemented at Oxford**

These reference points are used as part of the course design process. Course proposers are required to locate a course in relation to the appropriate level FHEQ, ensure learning outcomes align with the relevant qualification descriptor, and to take into account any relevant subject benchmark statements. This information then goes on to form part of the definitive record of the course (see A2). Alignment with external reference points is reviewed and monitored through the external examining process and as part of departmental review (see B8). With the exception of a

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<sup>1</sup> Being able to demonstrate the achievement of positively defined learning outcomes, as assessed against agreed standards, is particularly important for UK universities which advocate this approach to the weighting of courses as distinct from many European universities where the key element is minimum length of study.

small number of courses, mainly within the Department for Continuing Education, the University's courses are not modularised or specifically credit-rated (see A2).

#### **How this is reflected in the QA calendar**

Confirmation of continuing alignment with external reference points will be noted in the consideration of new course proposals by divisions and by Education Committee and in external examiners' reports. It will also be covered in the review of courses as part of departmental review.

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## **A2 Degree-awarding bodies' reference points for academic standards**

There are two Expectations in chapter A2.

### **A2.1 Academic governance arrangements and degree-awarding bodies' academic frameworks and regulations**

*'In order to secure their academic standards, degree-awarding bodies establish transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations to govern how they award academic credit and qualifications.'*

As autonomous institutions degree-awarding bodies are free to determine what programmes they offer and which qualifications they confer. Their governance framework sets out where the responsibility sits for academic standards and quality, and how that responsibility is discharged. It is expected that the authority and responsibility for setting and maintaining academic standards is held by the senior academic body of the institution, and academic decisions are made separately from any commercial decisions. That body approves the academic frameworks and regulations which form the internal reference points for quality and standards, and has final authority to approve a programme or confirm the award of a qualification.

Degree-awarding bodies are also expected to establish their own academic frameworks setting out what qualifications they award for both taught programmes and research degrees. These should relate to the wider assessment regulations in place as given in A3 (covered in detail in B4, B6 and B11).

#### **How this is implemented at Oxford**

Within the collegiate University the senior academic authority acting on behalf of Council is Education Committee. The authority to perform its assigned functions is set out in regulation (see Statutes and Regulations) and these should be read in conjunction with the regulations which apply to divisional boards. Those involved with quality assurance are expected to be familiar with the overall structure of these responsibilities. In relation to assessment and examinations, the distribution of shared responsibilities with the Proctors is set out in the relevant guidance. The University sets out what qualifications it awards in Statute X, with the detailed characteristics of awards explained within the [University awards framework](#) and the [Examination Regulations](#).

#### **How this is reflected in the QA calendar**

The arrangements set out in the calendar, for example, in relation to approval of new courses, departmental reviews, internal and external examiners' reports all reflect the collegiate University's structures for the award of qualifications as set out in statutes and regulations (including [Examination Regulations](#)), [Education Committee policies and guidance](#), divisional codes of practice and protocols.

## **A2.2 Definitive records of individual programmes and qualifications**

***‘Degree-awarding bodies maintain a definitive record of each programme and qualification that they approve (and of subsequent changes to it) which constitutes the reference point for delivery and assessment of the programme, its monitoring and review, and for the provision of records of study to students and alumni.’***

By providing a definitive record for a programme, degree awarding bodies are able to demonstrate that threshold standards are set and maintained and ensure that amongst students and staff there is a clear understanding of the programme which has been formally approved. This record becomes a reference point for the delivery of the programme and its assessment. Institutions are expected to maintain the definitive record, updating it as and when any amendments are approved.

The definitive record of the programme sets out the intended learning outcomes and attributes for the programme as a whole, and:

- includes the level on the FHEQ at which the qualification is located and shows how the overall learning outcomes are aligned with the qualification descriptors in the FHEQ;
- shows clearly how the content and structure of the programme and its assessment strategy provide students with the opportunities for learning and assessment they need to enable them to demonstrate that they have achieved the programme learning outcomes at the requisite level;
- provides evidence that, in designing the programme, account has been taken of relevant subject benchmark statements (see A1) and the requirements of PSRBs, where applicable;
- demonstrates compliance with the academic framework and regulations of the institution;
- includes any approved variations or subsequent changes.

### **How this is implemented at Oxford**

The relevant general and special regulations for each course (as contained within the [Examination Regulations](#)), form the definitive record of the course, supplemented by the relevant examination conventions and the course handbook. Further guidance in relation to the content of course handbooks is located in the *Policy and Guidance on course information*. Further guidance on the content of examination conventions is located in the *Policy and Guidance for examiners*, [Annex I](#).

### **How this is reflected in the QA calendar**

Course handbooks and websites should be updated over the Long Vacation and the completion of this process reported to the relevant academic committee. Examination conventions should be reviewed and revised during Michaelmas term (or earlier if summative assessment takes place during Michaelmas term).

## **A3 Securing academic standards and an outcomes-based approach to academic awards**

This chapter contains four Expectations which highlight the key mechanisms by which degree-awarding bodies secure academic standards and quality assure the learning outcomes-based approach to academic awards in the UK. The detailed operation of the Expectations are expanded upon in relevant chapters of Part B of the Quality Code.

### **A3.1 Design and approval of modules, programmes and qualifications**

***‘Degree-awarding bodies establish and consistently implement processes for the approval of taught programmes and research degrees that ensure that academic standards are set at a level which meets the UK threshold standard for the qualification and are in accordance with their own academic frameworks and regulations.’***

See Chapters B1 and B11.

### **A3.2 Assessment of learning outcomes**

***‘Degree-awarding bodies ensure that credit and qualifications are awarded only where:***

- ***the achievement of relevant learning outcomes (module learning outcomes in the case of credit, and programme outcomes in the case of qualifications) has been demonstrated through assessment***
- ***both the UK threshold standards and the academic standards of the relevant degree-awarding body have been satisfied.’***

See Chapters B6 and B7.

### **A3.3 Monitoring and review of alignment with UK threshold academic standards and degree-awarding bodies’ own standards**

***‘Degree-awarding bodies ensure that processes for the monitoring and review of programmes are implemented which explicitly address whether the UK threshold academic standards are achieved and whether the academic standards required by the individual degree-awarding body are being maintained.’***

See Chapter B8.

### **A3.4 Externality**

***‘In order to be transparent and publicly accountable, degree-awarding bodies use external and independent expertise at key stages of setting and maintaining academic standards to advise on whether:***

- ***UK threshold academic standards are set, delivered and achieved***
- ***the academic standards of the degree-awarding body are appropriately set and maintained.’***

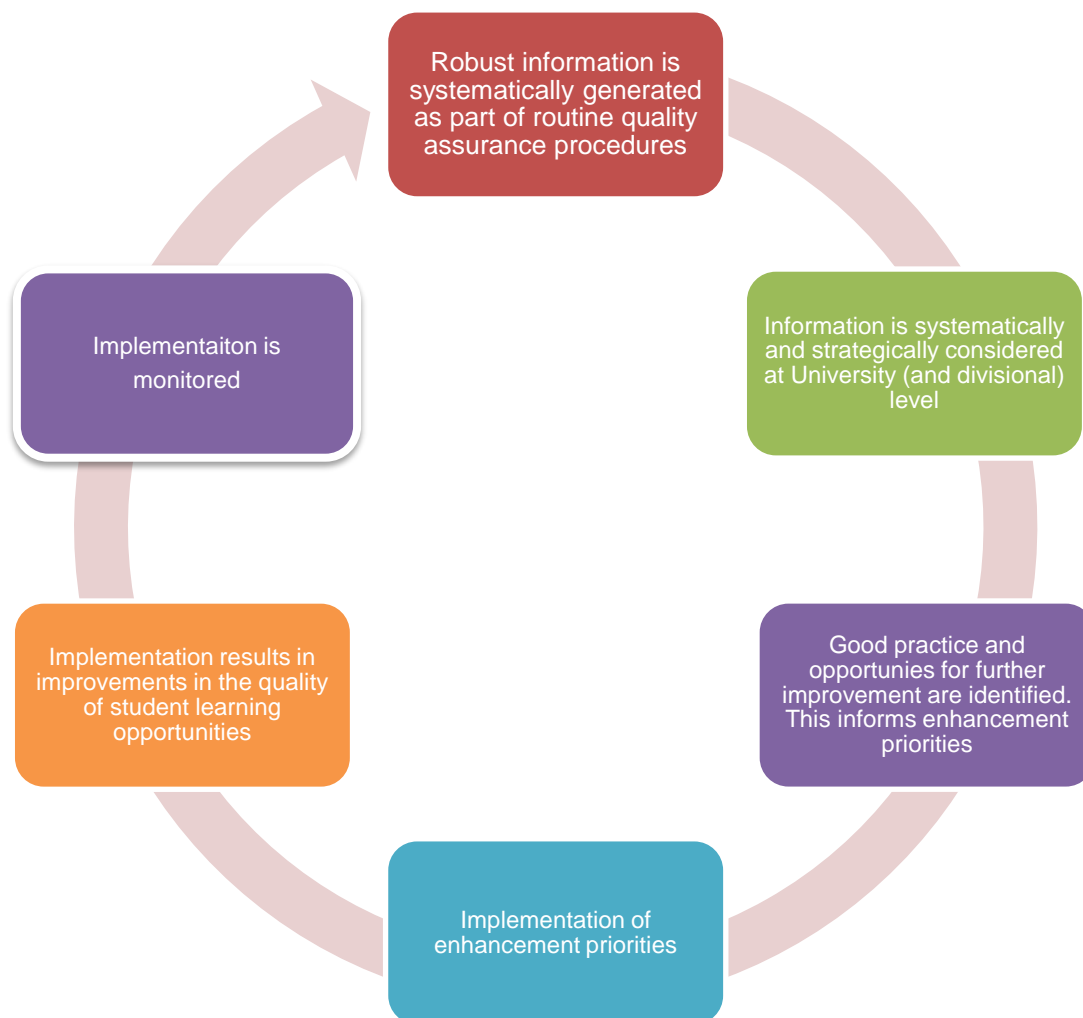
See Chapters B1, B6 and B7.

## Part B Assuring and enhancing academic quality

### What is meant by enhancement?<sup>2</sup>

The word *enhancement* is used throughout **all** the sections of Part B of the Quality Code. It is used to mean the deliberate steps that are taken at institution level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities.

The approach can be modelled as in the diagram below:



It is not enough to pursue only incrementally the development of good practice at a local level. The concept of enhancement requires a systematic approach to identifying potential improvements and disseminating good practice across the institution. Institutions are expected to show how they *enhance* their provision in the context of each Expectation in Part B. T

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/Application-of-enhancement.pdf>



## B1 Programme design, development and approval

***‘Higher education providers have effective processes for the design and approval of programmes.’***

The approval of a new course or of major changes to an existing course is seen as a key moment when a university exercises its responsibility for maintaining the standards of its awards and ensuring the quality of learning opportunities for its students.

The process provides an opportunity to look at a proposed course as a whole and reflect on whether it meets internal and external expectations (see right and Part A above), in terms of design and content.

The Expectation and Indicators for this section emphasise the importance attached to the effectiveness of the design and approval processes for a new course. Institutions are expected to ensure that:

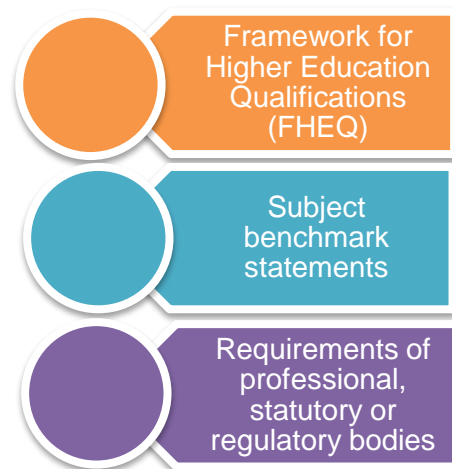
- there is strategic oversight to ensure that processes are applied systematically and consistently;
- there are well defined criteria for approval and clear roles and responsibilities;
- the process engages with external reference points;
- students are involved in both the design and approval stages;
- external expertise is drawn on in design and for verification of quality and standards;
- there is appropriate evaluation of the process and ongoing redevelopment;
- staff and other participants are supported in their roles, enabling them to contribute effectively to the process.

### **How this is implemented at Oxford**

Proposals for new courses or major changes almost always originate from staff in faculties and departments and go through a development process locally, involving students and external advisors. They are then scrutinised formally by the relevant division, including review by an external reviewer, and are considered by the Conference of Colleges, before approval is sought from Education Committee. Proposals must meet the internal and external requirements set out in the [P&G on new courses and major changes to courses \(including closure\)](#).

### **How this is reflected in the QA calendar**

Departments/faculties should undertake, during Michaelmas term each year, a review of progress of the development process of any new courses or major changes to courses. This should factor in consideration of the ongoing timetable for approval and the consultation required, taking into account the timescales indicated in the [P&G new courses](#).



## B2 Recruitment, selection and admission

***‘Recruitment and admission policies, procedures and practices are accessible, explicit and transparent: they are consistently applied and documented resulting in justified and equitable admission practices that adhere to the principles of fair admission.’***

The admissions process is the first point at which an institution has formal contact with its prospective students, both undergraduate and graduate, and it is important that it operates to the highest standards of professionalism. This chapter of the Code addresses the processes in place for oversight of admissions, and the admissions process from start to finish. Additional guidance is provided in *Chapter B11: Research degrees* of the Quality Code for those responsible for recruitment, selection and admission of research degree students.

The chapter acknowledges that recruitment and admissions policies will vary between institutions, reflecting institutional missions and priorities, but emphasises the importance of fairness and transparency in every aspect of the process. Staff involved in recruitment should be fully briefed on their role and the limits of their powers and responsibilities and should conduct themselves professionally. Institutions should have policies and procedures in place to review their recruitment and admissions policies and processes and handle complaints and appeals should they arise.

The chapter addresses key moments in the recruitment and admissions cycle, suggesting institutions ensure that:

- students are enabled to make informed decisions guided by high quality information;
- the overall process including the particular role of the student themselves is clear;
- academic and non-academic entry requirements are transparent and should not include any unnecessary hurdles to admission;
- where the selection of students uses information not captured on the application form, such as interviews, auditions, additional tests, institutions should explain clearly to prospective students what these selection tools entail, why they are being used and the contribution they make to the selection decision, while maintaining the right to exercise academic judgement in selection;
- decisions are clearly communicated along with next steps;
- prospective students are kept informed should any significant changes be made to the course.

### **How this is implemented at Oxford**

The collegiate University’s fundamental principle is that students are recruited and admitted on the basis of proven ability and potential to benefit from the type of education offered in Oxford. All aspects of the relevant processes receive close monitoring and review at both undergraduate and graduate level. The responsibilities for undergraduate admissions across the collegiate University are set out in the [Common framework for undergraduate admissions](#) and for graduate admissions in the [Graduate admissions and funding handbook](#) as well as in the [Policy on research degrees](#) and the [P&G on postgraduate taught courses](#).

### **How this is reflected in the QA calendar**

Faculties and departments must undertake annual reviews of both undergraduate and graduate admissions and processes – with a particular focus on the number and quality of applications, offers and acceptances, and scrutiny by gender, previous institution, fee status, and disability. For undergraduate admissions, compliance with the *Common framework* must be certified annually. Figures and statistics at institutional level are reviewed by the Admissions Committee/Executive for undergraduates and the Graduate Admissions Committee for graduates.

## B3 Learning and teaching

***‘Higher education providers, working with their staff, students and other stakeholders, articulate and systematically review and enhance the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices, so that every student is enabled to develop as an independent learner, study their chosen subject(s) in depth and enhance their capacity for analytical, critical and creative thinking.’***

This chapter is concerned with how an institution ensures that their approach to learning and teaching is effective for all learners. It identifies three specific objectives but then relates them to the identification and promotion of three key approaches:

- inclusive learning which promotes equality, diversity and equal opportunity – to be facilitated by the way courses are designed and delivered, and students are supported;
- institutions, staff, students and other stakeholders working in partnership – institutions are responsible for providing inclusive learning opportunities and support, and students are responsible for making effective use of these;
- learning facilitated by enthusiastic and capable staff through teaching and other types of support for learning, whether formal or informal – institutions are expected to ensure that their staff are appropriately qualified, developed and supported, and that they engage in reflective practice.

Overall institutions are expected to have a clear strategic approach to teaching and learning, including mechanisms for addressing themes that cross subject boundaries such as digital literacy, entrepreneurship and internationalisation, and to be systematic in gathering and analysing information to ensure the effectiveness of their approach. The chapter also focuses on the learning environment provided – both physical and virtual – and its accessibility for all students, how students are informed about the learning opportunities and support available to them, and how their progress is monitored. Particular reference is made to induction, study skills and the support for academic good practice and the avoidance of plagiarism (see B4).

### **How this is implemented at Oxford**

The collegiate University identifies and addresses strategic issues in teaching and learning through the work of its Education Committee and its panels, its four academic divisions and OUDCE, and through the complementary work of the Senior Tutors’ Committee and the Graduate Committee of Conference. Staff are supported in the development of their teaching through the support of the Oxford Learning Institute. For undergraduates the University’s overall approach to teaching and learning – focused on effective small group teaching via tutorial and small group work - is articulated in the [P&G on undergraduate learning and teaching](#). For taught graduate courses the approach is given in the [P&G for postgraduate taught courses](#). Review for both groups involves a range of processes including course monitoring (using the Student Barometer and NSS as appropriate) (see B8), course and departmental review, and reflection on the learning and teaching implications of examiners’ and external examiners’ reports. Information on learning opportunities and support is provided primarily through course handbooks, college handbooks, Weblearn sites and the University’s website (see also Part C).

### **How this is reflected in the QA calendar**

Activities related to Expectation B3 are embedded throughout the QA calendar and include: updating of course handbooks and websites, course monitoring activities such as review of annual programme statistics, NSS/Student Barometer results and external examiners’ reports, and the completion of and reflection on the quality assurance questionnaire. The oversight of teaching and learning provision is a key function of the business of faculty and department academic committees.

## **B4 Enabling student development and achievement**

***‘Higher education providers have in place, monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential.’***

This chapter relates to the range of things an institution does to support student development and achievement in its widest sense. It examines the key aspects of student support which are in place to enable groups of students and individual students to reach their academic, personal and professional potential, emphasising the importance of integration, coherence and internal cooperation between different areas.

These include:

- support services such as disability advice, counselling etc.
- learning resources such as libraries, information technology, specialist facilities etc.
- activities related to induction and progression
- opportunities to develop academic and professional skills
- extra-curricular activities such as volunteering, internships etc.
- careers information and guidance
- pastoral support

As with the other chapters, institutions are recommended to have a strategic approach and oversight of how they enable student development and achievement. The need to ensure a holistic, co-ordinated approach is identified as a key challenge for this area, integrating specialist services with local and individual activities, the work of external agencies and arrangements for student representation. Also important is ensuring that the division of roles and responsibilities is clear to staff and to students at every stage of their studies. It is essential to note that the development of potential involves not only identifying and addressing potential barriers, e.g. lack of appropriate provision or adjustment for a declared disability, but also ensuring that all students have access to opportunities to develop broader skills to enable their academic, personal and professional progression.

### **How this is implemented at Oxford**

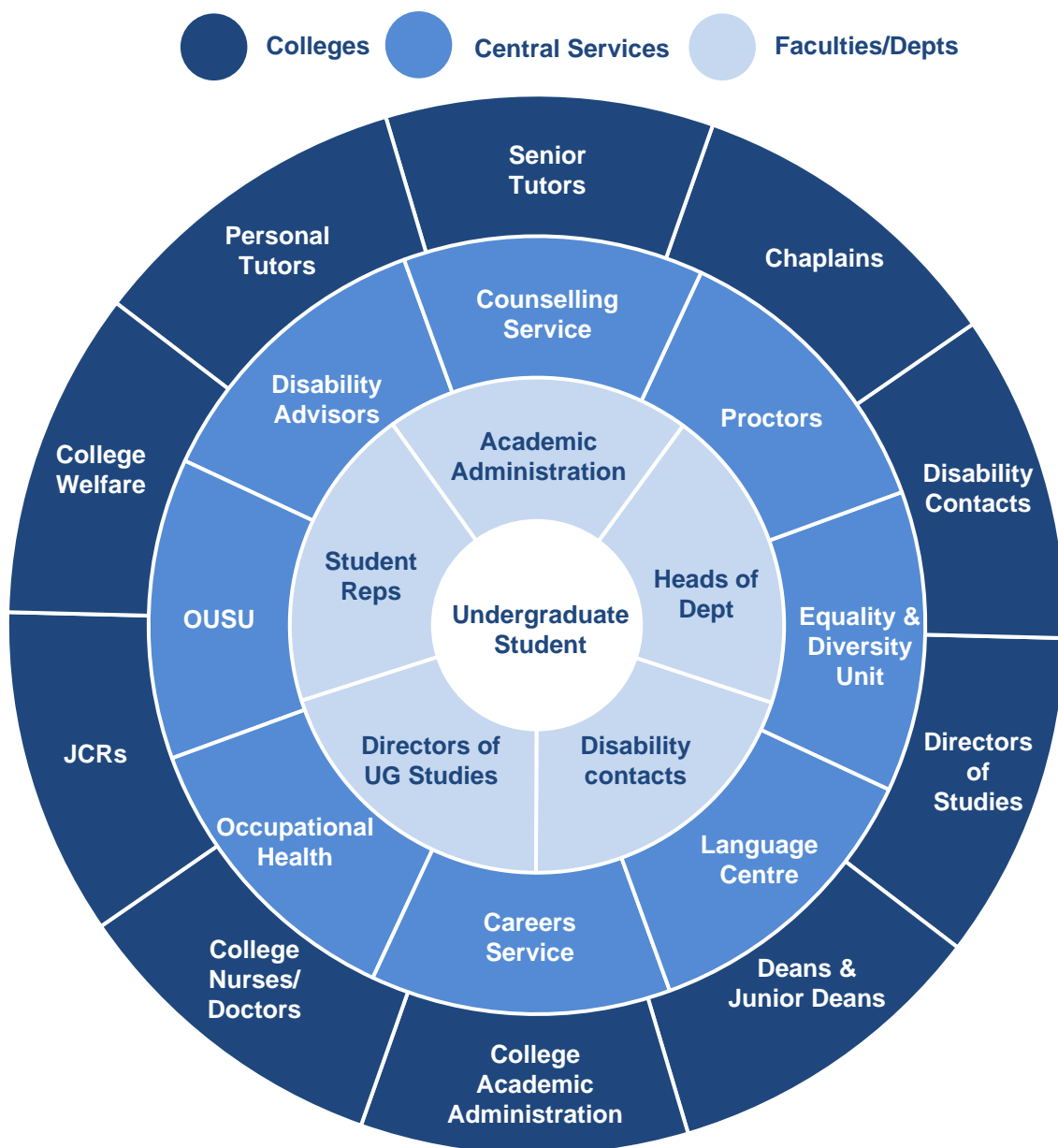
The diagrams (see next pages) setting out the collective support for undergraduate and graduate students across the collegiate University underline the extent of the complementary support provided for students’ individual welfare and the provision to enable academic, personal and professional progression.

The integration of this provision is reflected in formal terms in the structure and membership of Education Committee and its subcommittees, particularly in relation to college and student representation. It is specifically captured in relation to disabled students in the [Common framework for supporting disabled students](#). In practical terms integration is central to the role of academic administrators in faculties and departments, and in colleges, in the provision of student-friendly and accessible information, advice and guidance. This is also reflected in the [P&G on course information](#).

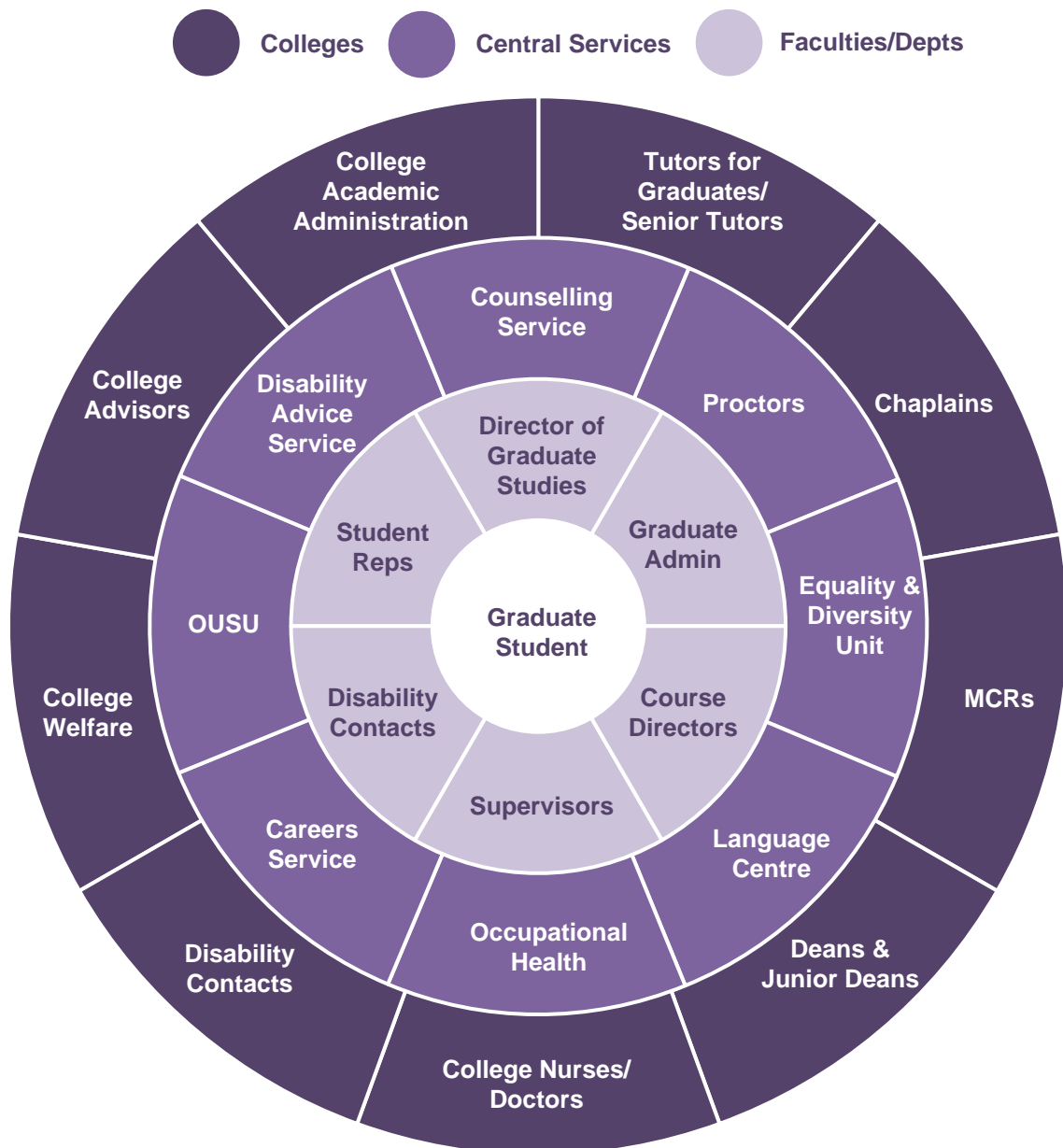
**How this is reflected in the QA calendar**

The evidence gathered in the divisional/Education Committee reviews of faculties and departments provides a point at which to reflect on all aspects of the learning opportunities provided for students – and the extent to which they offer effective support for the students in the faculty or department. Data from the Student Barometer and the NSS can be interrogated from both a faculty/department and a college perspective and can be used to consider the effectiveness of the partnership.

**Support for undergraduate academic, personal and professional development in the collegiate university**



## Support for graduate academic, personal and professional development in the collegiate university



### B5 Student engagement

***‘Higher education providers take deliberate steps to engage all students, individually and collectively, as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience.’***

This chapter deals with the engagement of students with the quality assurance and enhancement processes of their university, including formal representation mechanisms. It is written using the concept of ‘partnership’ to indicate students and staff working together to achieve joint goals, rather than a transactional relationship of provider and consumer.

Institutions are recommended to ensure that they have in a place a wide range of opportunities – formal and informal, ‘local’ and central – for students to engage in quality processes and to create an environment which proactively encourages students to do so fully. One way to do this is through implementing a range of student feedback mechanisms:

- surveys and other research activities;- for example, focus groups;
- student representative structures;
- student membership of committees and dialogue with decision makers;
- student consultation events, online discussion forums and student involvement in new projects;
- formal quality processes, for example, course review and departmental review.

Institutions are recommended to ensure they have in place effective collective student representation structures at all levels and that all students and staff are trained in relation to their roles. Institutions should share a wide range of information with their student bodies and student representatives to support meaningful engagement and discussion. This might include:

- the results of internal and external questionnaires/feedback, NSS and Student Barometer
- analyses of student performance at module and programme level
- reports from professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs)
- ‘closing the loop’ by reporting back on actions taken by the institution to enhance the student educational experience, particularly in response to student feedback
- external examiners’ reports.

#### **How this is implemented at Oxford**

Students individually act as partners in the quality assurance process through their engagement with their academic programme and giving feedback through surveys including the Student Barometer and National Student Survey. Through collective representation they work in partnership with the University on faculty/department and divisional academic and graduate committees as well as through faculty/departmental Joint Consultative Committees (JCCs) or equivalent. Students work with their colleges via the role of Junior and Middle Common Rooms in colleges and via the contributions of OUSU officers to the work of Education Committee and its panels and subcommittees. Student representation arrangements in departments and faculties should be informed by the [P&G on student engagement and representation](#). This is reinforced by the presence of student representatives on divisional/Education Committee reviews of departments and faculties, and student involvement in the design of new courses (see B1 and B8). Practices may vary across faculties and departments to reflect particular circumstances and needs, but operate within the University’s framework.

#### **How this is reflected in the QA calendar**

The engagement of students in quality assurance and enhancement is integrated into a wide range of activities in the calendar. Each year, normally in Hilary term, departments/faculties should formally reflect on and review the opportunities for student representation and involvement, including the arrangements to support that work, and any developments for the following year should be discussed and endorsed.



## B6 Assessment and recognition of prior learning

***‘Higher education providers operate equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment, including for the recognition of prior learning, which enable every student to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the credit or qualification being sought.’***

Assessment is defined as the process by which academic staff form judgements as to the extent students have achieved the intended learning outcomes of a programme, or of an element of a programme. While assessment takes place within the context of the academic framework and examination regulations of the institution (see A2.1) it should also be seen as part of the process of learning for the student. The importance of assessment in higher education is reflected in the scale of this chapter of the Code, which comprises 18 Indicators covering all aspects of the assessment process.

Institutions are recommended to ensure that:

- they have effective policies, regulations and processes for ensuring the academic standards of awards and the judgement of students against these standards, and that these are accessible to all the different audiences involved;
- staff involved in assessment must be trained and supported in their roles, and assessment design and practice must be informed by professional practice and scholarship;
- assessment must be carried out securely and results must be recorded accurately and communicated promptly;
- students are supported in the development of skills in good academic practice, appropriately engaged with the assessment process to promote shared understanding, and have their learning supported by effective feedback on their performance;
- assessment is designed to be inclusive so as to ensure that all students have the opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of the required learning outcomes.

### **How this is implemented at Oxford**

Primary responsibility for assessments rests with the relevant supervisory body and the examiners whom they nominate. Either the supervisory bodies or their constituent departments play a key role in the development and the relevant course handbook, in particular sections related to assessment (including the course learning outcomes). They are responsible for the examination framework (paper setting, examination conventions), and for the primary scrutiny of examiners' reports.

Institutional oversight is in place through the University's regulatory and policy framework including:

- the process for the approval of nominations for internal and external examiners and assessors by the Proctors;
- the responsibility of the Proctors for the fairness of examinations and assessment (see also B9);
- the provisions of the [P&G for examiners](#) which sets out expectations for all aspects of the assessment process;
- the scrutiny of the appropriateness of the proposed types of assessment forms a key part of the process of approval described in the [P&G on new courses and major changes to courses \(including closure\)](#) and in the [Procedure for Departmental Reviews](#) (see also B1 and B8);
- the place of assessment in courses as covered in the [P&G on undergraduate learning and teaching](#) and the [P&G for postgraduate taught courses](#) (see also B3).



## How this is reflected in the QA calendar

Faculties and departments address the equity, validity and robustness of their assessment processes and related activities, through a range of activities across the year including the annual consideration of internal and external examiners' reports including the consideration of annual assessment outcomes (including interrogation of data in terms of gender, ethnicity and disability).

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## B7 External examining

### ***'Higher education providers make scrupulous use of external examiners'***

The role of external examiners is summarised in Part A of the Quality Code. External examiners are appointed:

'to provide impartial advice and recommendations as to whether assessment demonstrates that threshold academic standards are achieved and that academic standards relative to the threshold are calibrated in accordance with the degree-awarding body's regulations'.

Chapter B7 of the Code explores the implications of this definition for both external examiners themselves and for the institutions in which they serve.

External examiners are expected to provide informed comment and recommendations on:

- whether an institution is maintaining the *threshold academic standards* set for its awards (see Part A);
- whether the assessment process measures student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme and is conducted in line with the institution's policies and regulations;
- whether the academic standards and the achievements of students are comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which the external examiners have experience;
- good practice and innovation relating to learning, teaching and assessment observed by the external examiners; and
- opportunities to enhance the quality of the learning opportunities provided to students.

Institutions are recommended to have explicit policies and regulations governing the nomination and appointment of external examiners. The chapter contains the extensive national appointment criteria for external examiners which institutions are expected to follow. Once appointed, external examiners must be supported in the carrying out of their role, inducted and provided with all necessary information. Their details (name, position and university) must be published and their reports scrutinised appropriately and made available to students.

### **How this is implemented at Oxford**

External examiners are nominated by the responsible body concerned and appointments are subject to approval by the Proctors. Preliminary information is provided by the University and the responsible body, and the chair of examiners and examinations officers (or equivalent) act as the main channels of communication. Prior to the examination period, external examiners are consulted on the draft examination papers and their comments incorporated in the process of amendment and refinement. External examiners' reports are scrutinised by faculties/departments, divisions and on behalf of Education Committee. The responsible body is required to provide an informed response to the external, which – where it does not accept a recommendation or comment – demonstrates that this has been considered carefully and provides a rationale for the approach taken.

### **How this is reflected in the QA calendar**

Consideration of the reports from examiners and from external examiners forms one of the key points in the calendar for academic committees in faculties and departments, and subsequent report to the relevant division. Consideration may be split between the scrutiny of reports on undergraduate programmes in Michaelmas term and that for Master's programmes in Hilary term. New external examiners should be inducted as required and their details updated in the course handbook as part of the review before the start of Michaelmas term.

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## **B8 Programme monitoring and review**

***'Higher education providers, in discharging their responsibilities for setting and maintaining academic standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, operate effective, regular and systematic processes for monitoring and for review.'***

This chapter emphasises the significance of programme monitoring and review for an institution's exercise of its responsibilities with regard to academic standards and quality of learning opportunities. It allows institutions to ensure that:

- they have offered, and continue to offer, appropriate learning opportunities which enable the intended learning outcomes of the programme to be achieved;
- the programme is effective in achieving its stated aims and remains current and effective in terms of its curriculum and assessment;
- they evaluate student attainment of academic standards; and that
- their portfolio remains current and relevant, and continues to be aligned with their mission and strategic priorities.

Programme monitoring and programme review are particular stages within an ongoing process of continuous engagement by staff and students with a programme. They provide a formal opportunity for institutions to reflect on their academic provision and to consider how it may be changed to enhance the student learning experience. Programme monitoring (usually a faculty/departmental responsibility) refers to a regular, systematic process which provides a check on ongoing learning and teaching provision at an operational level on an annual or similar basis. Periodic review of programmes (usually an institutional responsibility) has a broader remit, looking at trends over time, and takes place less frequently, on an agreed basis.

For both processes emphasis is placed on the:

- appropriate use of relevant quantitative and qualitative data
- use of external reference points and external expertise
- involvement of students
- capturing and reflecting on cumulative change
- reporting of the outcomes of the process at an appropriate level, and where relevant, identification of overarching themes and wider actions.

### **How this is implemented at Oxford**

The University undertakes programme monitoring through a range of processes rather than a single event. These processes include the annual consideration of admissions statistics, examiners and external examiners' reports, annual programme statistics and student feedback mechanisms. An overview of the various annual monitoring processes is provided in the [Procedures for the annual monitoring of courses](#).

Wider reviews are undertaken periodically through a process of department review undertaken jointly by the relevant division and Education Committee. These draw on the expertise of a panel including both internal and external members and review all the activities of the department concerned – research, learning and teaching, organisation and resources – in a national and international context. Review reports then follow an agreed pathway through the relevant department, divisional and Education Committee committees. The process is detailed in the [Procedure for Departmental Reviews](#).

### **How this is reflected in the QA calendar**

The review of examiners and external examiners' reports (as described in B7 above) is a key part of programme monitoring alongside the monitoring of admissions. Outputs from student feedback mechanisms are to be considered as they become available.

Consideration of department reviews takes place at three points:

- in the period leading up to a review - establishing the process for producing and approving the faculty/department self-evaluation document;
- in the period following a review - when the report is available and the faculty/department is preparing its response and action plan for follow through; and
- at a mid-point between reviews - when the faculty/department is producing an indication of the actions and developments three years after the review.

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## **B9 Academic appeals and student complaints**

***'Higher education providers have procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints about the quality of learning opportunities; these procedures are fair, accessible and timely, and enable enhancement.'***

This chapter defines an academic appeal as 'a request for a review of a decision of an academic body charged with making decisions on assessment, student progression and awards' and defines a complaint as 'the expression of a specific concern about matters that affect the quality of a student's learning opportunities'. They are dealt with together in this chapter although it is understood that institutions may have separate processes for dealing with appeals and complaints.

The chapter outlines the main components it expects to see in an institution's arrangements for dealing with complaints and appeals, including:

- opportunities for early or alternative forms of resolution, including mediation
- a clear and accessible process with appropriate information and support available for staff and students
- a fair procedure, which is proportionate, and allows for objective and impartial consideration and permits all parties to engage on an equal footing
- timely consideration followed by appropriate action

- monitoring and evaluation of effectiveness of processes
- mechanisms for reflecting on outcomes to enable enhancement.

Institutions are also asked to ensure that any students raising a complaint or appeal are not disadvantaged by doing so.

This chapter of the Code should also be read in light of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator's [Good practice framework for handling complaints and academic appeals](#).

### **How this is implemented at Oxford**

Within the collegiate University, information to students is available via the [Oxford Students website](#) and the [University Student Handbook](#) (which incorporates what used to be the published as the Proctors' and Assessor's Memorandum). All faculties and departments are asked to customise and publicise a complaints and appeals template. The main route for the consideration of complaints and appeals is via the work of the Proctors and this is set out in the relevant statute and regulations. The availability of appropriate complaints and appeals mechanisms is completed by the parallel and complementary arrangements within colleges and the work of the Conference of Colleges' Appeal Tribunal (CCAT). The Proctors' annual reports on complaints and appeals provide important opportunities for institutional monitoring, evaluation and reflection on the outcomes for enhancement purposes.

### **How this is reflected in the QA calendar**

As the majority of the process and monitoring of formal complaints and appeals is undertaken by the central and collegiate bodies there are no actions are specifically delegated to departments and faculties in the calendar. Faculties and departments are encouraged to ensure that arrangements for programme monitoring and review do take account of any complaints – and the lessons they may contain for enhancement and development.

## **B10 Managing higher education provision with others**

***'Degree-awarding bodies take ultimate responsibility for academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities irrespective of where these are delivered or who provides them. Arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with organisations other than the degree-awarding body are implemented securely and managed effectively.'***

This chapter relates to all learning opportunities leading to an award, or to specific credit toward an award, of an awarding institution delivered and/or supported and/or assessed through an arrangement with a partner organisation. It covers a wide variety of forms of collaboration and delivery arrangements, ranging from jointly awarded degree programmes through to student exchanges and placements. The fundamental principle, however, is that the degree-awarding body has ultimate responsibility for academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities, regardless of where these opportunities are delivered and who provides them.

The chapter expects that higher education offered with others will be undertaken within a strategic approach and with clear policies and procedures for development, approval and oversight of activities. The chapter promotes a risk-based approach which allows for the wide variety of activity captured by the definition to be managed proportionately to the risk to quality and standards.

### **How this is implemented at Oxford**

The University's approach this area of activity is set out in its [P&G on providing education with others](#). It sets out the need for central approval of any collaborations which contribute to an award of the University, and includes specific guidance on student exchanges and other forms of placement which are mainly managed at a more local level.

### **How this is reflected in the QA calendar**

There is an expectation that all forms of collaborative provision will be reviewed at some point in the course of an academic year as required. This should ensure that the currency and effectiveness of any arrangements, the performance of participants, and the feedback from participants are kept under scrutiny at department/faculty level.

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## **B11 Research degrees**

***'Research degrees are awarded in a research environment that provides secure academic standards for doing research and learning about research approaches, methods, procedures and protocols. This environment offers students quality of opportunities and the support they need to achieve successful academic, personal and professional outcomes from their research degrees.'***

This chapter addresses all aspects of the management of the provision of research degrees and the support of research students. Institutions are expected to have clear regulations and codes of practice relating to research degrees which are accessible to all staff and students. The admissions process must be carefully managed to ensure that only students who are qualified and prepared to undertake the qualification are admitted, and that the right environment is available for their development as researchers.

The role of supervisors is addressed with the understanding that institutions are expected to ensure:

- that supervisors have the appropriate skills and subject knowledge to support and encourage research students, and to monitor their progress effectively;
- the provision of a supervisory team containing a main supervisor who is the clearly identified point of contact;
- that responsibilities are clearly communicated to supervisors and students; and
- that individual supervisors have sufficient time to carry out their responsibilities effectively.

Institutions are expected to have robust mechanisms for monitoring the progress of research students including explicit formal review at set stages and to offer appropriate opportunities for students to develop research, personal and professional skills. In common with Expectations for all students contained within the other chapters, institutions are expected to have in place mechanisms for the collection, review and response to research student feedback and procedures for dealing with complaints and appeals.

### **How this is implemented at Oxford**

The University's approach to the management of research degrees and the support of research students is found in the [Policy on Research Degrees](#) and the divisional *Codes of practice for supervision*.

**How this is reflected in the QA calendar**

Opportunities to monitor provision and support for students studying for research degrees can be found at a number of points in the academic year: first, monitoring the admission of research students – including the quality of applicants and successful candidates, proportions of available funding and studentships, offers and acceptances, distribution of college places; second, reviewing annual programme statistics relating to transfer and confirmation of status, thesis submission and completion; third, monitoring student reports and student feedback at both individual and collective level.

## Part C Information about higher education provision

***‘Education providers produce information for their intended audiences about the learning opportunities they offer that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.’***

This chapter of the Quality Code identifies the provision of information as one of the ways of promoting public confidence in the value of higher education. Institutions can promote such confidence by producing appropriate information about the higher education opportunities they offer which is focused on their intended audiences.

The Expectation is based on four general principles:

- Principle 1: Information that higher education providers produce about themselves and the learning opportunities they offer should be clear, timely, current, transparent, and focused on the needs of the intended audiences.
- Principle 2: Higher education providers are responsible and accountable for the information they produce about the higher education learning opportunities they offer. At the same time, providers have autonomy regarding the mechanisms and media they choose to communicate this information.
- Principle 3: Information should be available and retrievable where intended audiences and information users can reasonably expect to find it. The format and delivery of information should take account of the access requirements of a diverse audience.
- Principle 4: Information produced by higher education providers should offer a fair and accurate reflection of the higher education learning opportunities they offer.

The seven Indicators largely identify the various types of material and their intended audiences, i.e. for the wider public, for prospective students, for current students, and for graduating students.

Reflecting the emphasis on information throughout Part B of the Code, Indicator 7 suggests that institutions set out their framework for managing academic standards and quality assurance and enhancement and describe the data and information used to support its implementation ; and that it maintains records (by type and category) of all collaborative activity that is subject to a formal agreement.

### **How this is implemented at Oxford**

The University provides information to its varied intended audiences through a wide variety of means. In particular, control of the quality of information to applicants is maintained through oversight by ADEX (for undergraduate programmes) and use of uniform template for the provision of online information on both the undergraduate and graduate admissions webpages. The [P&G on undergraduate learning and teaching](#), [P&G on postgraduate taught courses](#), and [Policy on research degrees](#) all indicate the information that should be made available to students either at the applicant stage or on-course. The [P&G on course information](#) set outs the minimum information requirements for on course taught students to be made available in the form of a course handbook. .

### **How this is reflected in the QA calendar**

Annual updating of the main sources of information – handbooks and websites – is undertaken during the Long Vacation. Given the emphasis now placed on information, this process should be reported as complete at the first meeting of the responsible academic committee of Michaelmas term.



# Resources

## Internal links

- *Examination Regulations*  
[www.admin.ox.ac.uk/examregs/](http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/examregs/)
- *Quality assurance calendar template*  
[www.admin.ox.ac.uk/edc/qa/pamc/](http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/edc/qa/pamc/)
- *P&G on new courses and major changes to courses (including closure)*  
[www.admin.ox.ac.uk/edc/policiesandguidance/pgnewcourses/](http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/edc/policiesandguidance/pgnewcourses/)
- *P&G on course information*  
<http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/edc/policiesandguidance/pandgoncourseinformation/>
- *Common framework for undergraduate admissions*  
[www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/applying-to-oxford/decisions/common-framework](http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/applying-to-oxford/decisions/common-framework)
- *Graduate Admissions and Funding handbook*  
Link available at: [https://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/aad/grad\\_admissions/](https://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/aad/grad_admissions/)
- *Policy on research degrees*  
[www.admin.ox.ac.uk/edc/policiesandguidance/policyonresearchdegrees](http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/edc/policiesandguidance/policyonresearchdegrees)
- *P&G on postgraduate taught courses*  
<http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/edc/policiesandguidance/pgpgtaughtcourses/>
- *P&G on undergraduate learning and teaching*  
<http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/edc/policiesandguidance/pguglearningandteaching/>
- *Common framework for supporting disabled students*  
<http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/aad/swss/disability/commonframework/#d.en.219649>
- *P&G on student engagement and representation*  
[www.admin.ox.ac.uk/edc/policiesandguidance/pandgstudentengageandrep/](http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/edc/policiesandguidance/pandgstudentengageandrep/)
- *P&G for examiners and others involved in University Examinations*  
[www.admin.ox.ac.uk/edc/policiesandguidance/pgexaminers/](http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/edc/policiesandguidance/pgexaminers/)
- *Procedure for Departmental Reviews*  
[www.admin.ox.ac.uk/edc/qa/deptreviews/](http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/edc/qa/deptreviews/)
- *Procedures for the annual monitoring of courses*  
[www.admin.ox.ac.uk/edc/qa/pamc/](http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/edc/qa/pamc/)
- *P&G on providing education with others*  
[www.admin.ox.ac.uk/edc/policiesandguidance/pgeducationwithothers/](http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/edc/policiesandguidance/pgeducationwithothers/)

## External links

- UK Quality Code  
[www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code)
- The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ)  
[www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/qualifications-frameworks.pdf](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/qualifications-frameworks.pdf)
- Subject benchmark statements  
[www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/subject-benchmark-statements/honours-degree-subjects](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/subject-benchmark-statements/honours-degree-subjects)