UK Quality Code
for Higher Education

Advice and Guidance

Monitoring and Evaluation

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Contents

Regulatory contexts for the Quality Code

The Quality Code articulates a set of principles that apply across the UK through four Expectations. These Expectations are then explained and contextualised through Core and Common practices in a way that allows institutions to demonstrate them. The Expectations, Core and Common practices are not regulatory requirements in England, but the Practices should be demonstrated by providers operating in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

National regulators and QAA are not bound by the information in this advice and guidance and will not view it as containing indicators of compliance. This guidance does not interpret statutory requirements.

Terminology

Monitoring: The routine collection and analysis of information that focuses on an area of work, project or programme/course, undertaken while the area of work, project or programme/course is ongoing.

Evaluation: The periodic, retrospective assessment of an organisation, an area of work, project or course, that might be conducted internally or by external independent evaluators. Evaluation uses information from monitoring, current and historic, to develop an understanding and inform planning.

Providers: Any organisation involved in the provision of higher education to students and apprentices.

Degree-awarding bodies: Organisations empowered to award higher education awards under relevant UK statutes.

Expectations and Practices

The advice underneath the Expectations and Practices is not mandatory for providers but illustrative of a range of possible approaches.

Monitoring and evaluation of higher education is an essential process within providers, forming a fundamental part of the academic cycle. It can, and should, look at all aspects of the higher education experience. All higher education providers are involved in course monitoring and review processes as these enable providers to consider how learning opportunities for students may be improved.

The academic standards of courses meet the requirements of the relevant national qualifications framework.

Expectations for standards

The value of qualifications awarded to students at the point of qualification and over time is in line with sector-recognised standards.

Monitoring and evaluation ensures that providers' academic provision enables students to achieve the intended learning outcomes of courses. They evaluate student attainment of academic standards and allow providers to confirm that their portfolio aligns with their mission and strategic priorities.

Monitoring and evaluation is an essential process within a provider's internal quality assurance mechanisms, covering all provision that leads to their awards and assuring the standard of those qualifications. Relevant sector-recognised standards form a baseline for monitoring and evaluation systems.

Core practices

- **The provider ensures that the threshold standards for its qualifications are consistent with the relevant national qualifications frameworks.**
  In practice, this means that providers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland refer to the relevant national qualifications framework when designing monitoring and evaluations policies and processes, and ensure they assess whether threshold standards are being achieved by their graduates.
- *Providers based in England and registered with the Office for Students (OfS) should refer to the OfS sector-recognised standards when considering how their academic frameworks and regulations adhere to regulatory requirements in that nation.*

  The provider ensures that students who are awarded qualifications have the opportunity to achieve standards beyond the threshold level that are reasonably comparable with those achieved in other UK providers.
- *In practice, this means that providers collect and analyse data that allows for comparison and make appropriate use of externality and sector guidance on, for example, degree classifications and algorithms.*

  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.
  In practice, this means that degree-awarding bodies ensure monitoring and evaluation arrangements are tailored to HE delivery in other organisations and learning environments, which may include satisfying themselves that those organisations' own monitoring systems are sufficient and feed in to their own appropriately.

Common practice

The provider reviews its core practices for standards regularly and uses the outcomes to drive improvement and enhancement.
In practice, this means that providers have formal systems in place with the express purpose of using the outcomes from monitoring and evaluation activity as a mechanism for enhancing their provision beyond meeting threshold regulatory requirements.

Courses are well-designed, provide a high-quality academic experience for all students and enable a student's achievement to be reliably assessed.

Expectations for quality

From admission through to completion, all students are provided with the support that they need to succeed in and benefit from higher education.

Effective monitoring and evaluation allows providers to consider objectively whether their courses are in fact well-designed and high-quality, and can consider whether other systems and processes are effective in ensuring reliable assessment.

Monitoring and evaluation systems look at all stages of the student experience and consider the support provided to students.

Core practices

- **The provider designs and/or delivers high-quality courses.**
  In practice, this means that providers routinely monitor their course provision to allow objective assessment of whether this practice is being achieved.
- **The provider supports all students to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes.**
  In practice, this means that providers ensure that the support given to their students is scrutinised through their monitoring activity.
- **The provider actively engages students, individually and collectively, in the quality of their educational experience.**
  In practice, this means providers ensure effective collection, collation and analysis of student perspectives and feedback in monitoring and evaluation, and feed outcomes into strategic planning and course design as appropriate.

Common practices

- **The provider reviews its core practices for quality regularly and uses the outcomes to drive improvement and enhancement.**
  In practice, this means that providers regularly review and enhance their provision, reflecting on a range of data sets as they relate to quality to ensure courses and wider services remain fit for purpose and to take account of changing circumstances, demands and pedagogical developments.
- **The provider's approach to managing quality takes account of external expertise.**
- **The provider engages students individually and collectively in the development, assurance and enhancement of the quality of their educational experience.**
  In practice, this means that providers identify and involve key internal and external stakeholders, including students and external examiners, to the design, implementation and operation of monitoring and evaluation, as well as the analysis and communication of findings.

Guiding principles

The guiding principles given here are not mandatory for any provider. They are a concise expression of the fundamental practices of the higher education sector, based on the experience of a wide range of providers. They are intended as a framework for providers to consider when establishing new or looking at existing higher education provision. They are not exhaustive and there will be other ways for providers to meet their requirements.

1   **Providers agree strategic principles for monitoring and evaluation to ensure processes are applied systematically and operated consistently.**

Providers have strategic guiding principles that set out why monitoring and evaluation takes place and what it intends to achieve. They ensure that activities are relevant, useful, timely and credible. The processes used, and the results from monitoring and evaluation activity, are recorded clearly and are themselves reviewed periodically to ensure they remain fit for purpose.

2   **Providers normalise monitoring and evaluation as well as undertaking routine formal activities.**

Effective monitoring and evaluation is an ongoing activity incorporated into everyday, standard practice. Formal activities – such as periodic review of courses, annual monitoring and workshops – are set in place on a routine basis. Progress against plans developed in response to the outcomes of monitoring and evaluation is checked.

3   **Providers clarify aims, objectives, activities and actions, and identify the key indicators, issues, questions, targets and relevant information/data.**

Providers decide and prioritise what they will monitor and evaluate, fitting with internal and strategic priorities and external requirements, and within available resources, establishing systems which are ongoing and pre-emptive rather than simply reactive.

4   **Providers decide whom to involve in the different stages of monitoring and evaluation, clearly defining roles and responsibilities and communicating them to those involved.**

Providers identify key internal and external stakeholders, particularly students, allowing consideration of how they can be involved and contribute to the design and implementation of monitoring and evaluation systems, analysis of data and the communication of findings.

5   **Providers evaluate, analyse and use the information generated from monitoring to learn and improve.**

Providers ensure their processes periodically analyse and assess data they collect to generate evidence used in quality assurance and enhancement, internal decision-making, planning and learning processes.

6   **Providers communicate outcomes from monitoring and evaluation to staff, students and external stakeholders.**

Providers put in place mechanisms to share, discuss and interpret findings, for example, periodic internal meetings and specific evaluation workshops. These systems may also facilitate conversations on actions required and draw out learning points for the provider and other stakeholders.

7   **Providers take account of ethics and data protection requirements when designing and operating monitoring and evaluation systems.**

Providers have informed consent from any participants, ensure anonymity in the communication of findings, and respect GDPR and all other data protection laws.

Practical advice

This section provides practical, contextualised advice to providers on monitoring and evaluation. Where relevant, we have indicated which guiding principles the advice will help you achieve. Please bear in mind that this guidance is illustrative and intended to inform the approaches you consider and ultimately implement.
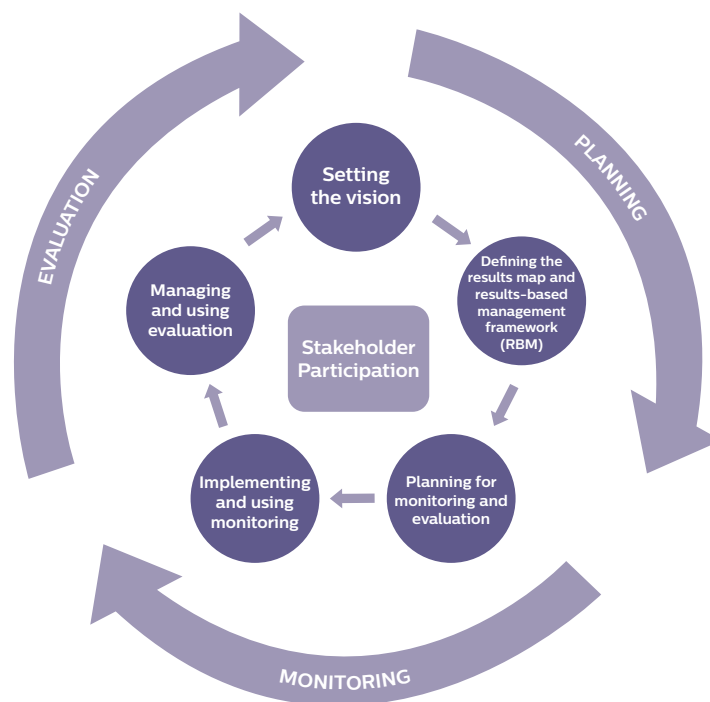
Establishing strategic principles for monitoring and evaluation
(Guiding principles 1, 3)

Providers develop strategic principles to ensure that monitoring and evaluation is relevant, useful, timely and credible. The starting point is what the provider is hoping to learn from the process – once this is established, systems and procedures can be designed that are fit for this purpose. The following examples of what monitoring and evaluation can do are not exhaustive but may provide a starting point for establishing or reviewing providers' strategies.

Effective monitoring and evaluation can:

- help develop clear, attainable outcomes, objectives, targets and goals
- assess and demonstrate effectiveness in achieving them
- improve organisational planning, performance, enhancement and decision making
- empower and motivate staff and key stakeholders
- promote ownership and engagement at appropriate levels of the organisation
- influence strategic decisions, policy development, process improvements, learning and teaching activity and assessment, and provide opportunities to test their effectiveness
- identify problems at provider, faculty and course level, and seek where appropriate to effect an early remedy
- contribute to the national evidence base about the effectiveness of HE provision
- help assess levels of satisfaction among students, alumni and employers
- help collate and disseminate good practice and techniques across faculties within a provider, and identify internal or external factors that may be facilitating or constraining progress
- ultimately help sustain successful courses and effective systems in the longer term.

Figure 1: A cyclical model of monitoring and evaluation.

Features of effective monitoring and evaluation (Guiding principles 2, 4, 5, 6)

Effective monitoring and evaluation analyses or interprets collected data to produce a systematic and objective assessment, taking place at specific times. It draws conclusions on relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability, asks whether providers are achieving what they set out to do, and identifies what could be done better or differently. These conclusions feed into course review.

Providers apply their monitoring and evaluation processes systematically and operate them consistently; the processes are capable of being applied to all higher education offered by a provider, but recognise and respect differences between subjects, modes and levels of study.

Providers use examples of sound practice and innovation, and relevant guidance from sector bodies, to keep their strategic approach to learning and teaching under review, to modify it as appropriate and to facilitate the continuous improvement of the learning opportunities they offer.

Information and data (Guiding principles 3, 5, 7)

Providers ensure the information and data gathered:

- is focused and feasible in relation to available resources; it should support rather than divert resources
- is consistent across all courses, accounting for different records systems and institutional definitions of data
- focuses on what providers 'need to know', not on what would be 'nice to know'
- is useful and timely in improving course design, learning and decision-making
- is accurate, relevant, credible, valid and reliable.

Quantitative and qualitative data can be drawn from internal and external sources, from as close to the point of delivery as possible up to faculty, thematic and institutional level. Consideration is given to the construction of a suitable format for collation of information drawn from multiple sources and how it can be presented coherently.

Common monitoring and evaluation data sources include:

- student feedback
- statistical information, including internal data on selected key performance indicators, such as student progression and achievement, retention, course or modular results, graduate employment and grade improvement trends
- research degree-specific information, for example, completion within expected time frames, prizes, publications, conference attendance and presentations
- external data sets such as the National Student Survey (NSS), Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) and Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES)

- feedback from course teams and professional services staff

- reports and feedback from external examiners, academic reviewers, employers (including those involved in workplace experience or education provision), external quality reviews (such as the Scottish Quality Enhancement Arrangements and Quality Enhancement Review in Wales), sector regulators, professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs), and other external experts

- feedback from previous monitoring exercises

- any conditions and recommendations arising from the course validation or latest revalidation

- issues that have arisen related to learning resources, staffing, engagements with employers, PSRBs, and United Kingdom Visas and Immigration (UKVI).

Where possible, data is disaggregated by protected characteristics to identify any differential impact on particular groups of students, while meeting the provider's data protection responsibilities. Providers also build in any requirements for, and timing of, monitoring and evaluation by PSRBs where appropriate.

> **Reflective questions**
>
> - What key data sources do you use to improve and develop courses?
> - How do you ensure your use of data is timely and supportive?

Roles and responsibilities (Guiding principles 2, 3, 4, 6)

The respective roles, responsibilities and authority of different individuals and bodies are clearly defined. Those involved are fully briefed about their role, the hierarchy of procedures, and the location of ultimate responsibility, including where a degree-awarding body works with a partner or delivery organisation to offer higher education. The processes to be followed are made clear. Attention is paid to terminology to aid full understanding. Providers determine responsibility for identifying, disseminating and embedding good practice through the processes.

Staff involved are drawn from across the provider as required, including academic and professional services staff. Where a provider works with other organisations, such as partner organisations and employers, relevant stakeholders contribute.

Providers support staff by putting in place appropriate training and development – for example, members of staff new to the processes may be given the opportunity to shadow more experienced colleagues. Providers recognise the value and mutual benefit for their own provision of facilitating staff involvement in course and departmental monitoring and evaluation at other higher education providers.

The extent to which a degree-awarding body delegates authority and operational roles for course monitoring and evaluation to a delivery organisation is defined in the agreement between the two bodies (see also Partnerships Theme).

> **Reflective questions**
>
> - What training and development do you have in place for both internal and external staff?
> - How do you ensure any partners are fully represented in monitoring and evaluation?

Student feedback and engagement (Guiding principles 2, 3, 5)

Providers enable students to provide individual as well as collective feedback and ensure they can engage in their monitoring and evaluation processes. Surveys are a mechanism for enabling this, as are focus groups, student–staff liaison committees, and student representation on providers' other committees. Providers consider the timing, regularity, accessibility and intended outcomes for these opportunities.

Provider committees may routinely receive reports on survey activity for consideration, and ensure appropriate action is taken and feedback loops are closed.

Survey reporting can invite comments on:

- participation rates
- results improvements or downward trends
- performance against benchmarks and internal performance indicators
- recommendations or actions for enhancement
- details on how feedback loops will be closed.

Timely reporting from surveys ensures actions are taken as quickly as possible. Internal and external surveys can be monitored and evaluated in the same way. The analysis of these surveys allows for greater student involvement and good practice may be to consider the results with student focus groups to be able to gain a greater understanding of their meaning.

> **Reflective question**
>
> - How do you involve students in the monitoring and evaluation of courses?

Communicating outcomes to staff, students and stakeholders (Guiding principle 6)

When providers have analysed the data, they have in place appropriate mechanisms for sharing, discussing and interpreting findings. This may include periodic internal meetings and specific evaluation workshops. These activities may also facilitate conversation on actions required and in drawing out learning points for other stakeholders.

Outcomes, including findings and actions taken as a result, are communicated to relevant stakeholders, for example PSRBs, through formal internal and external processes and/or incorporated into annual reporting.

> **Reflective question**
>
> - How do you communicate the outcomes of monitoring and evaluation to internal and external stakeholders?

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