Mapping Against the UK Quality Code

SECTION 11: STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

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 the code, *Student Engagement* is an important theme, particularly in relation to ensuring students have an excellent and supportive student experience. The engagement of students in academic and non-academic feedback is actively encouraged, as students provide meaningful contributions to the enhancement and improvement of teaching, learning and student experience services. The Quality Code describes this theme as follows:

> *This Theme describes the meaningful participation of students in quality assurance and enhancement processes, which results in the improvement of their educational experience as well as benefiting the wider student body, institution and sector. For student engagement to contribute effectively to quality assurance and enhancement processes, it needs to capture the voices of all students, irrespective of location, mode of delivery, level of study, or discipline.*

In practical terms, this means that students should have the opportunity to engage in the evaluation of education provision and that all voices should be represented by means of an equal and inclusive feedback system. It also focuses on students being the drivers of change and ensuring continuous improvement and enhancement of educational and student experience services.

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

Stakeholder: Used to define and describe anyone with an interest in student engagement, and may include the following: students; students' union, association or guild; academic and professional services staff; the provider; employers; regulatory bodies, such as professional, statutory and regulatory bodies; the wider external community, for example, service users; alumni.

Student body: Used to describe the entire student population. Depending on the context, this may include: individual students; groups of students with a common experience or interest (such as a club or society); formal representatives of a group (such as students' union, association or guild), or groups of students.

Students' representative body/organisation: Used to describe a formal body that represents and promotes the interests of students. This may be a students' union, a students' association or guild.

Partnership: For the purposes of this Theme, 'partner' and 'partnership' are used to define and indicate joint working between students and staff (or the students' union, association or guild and the provider). The level of each partner's engagement will vary depending on the context and aspect of the student experience.

Co-creation: Defined as the act of bringing different stakeholders together, to jointly produce a mutually valued outcome. Students can be engaged as co-creators at different levels, ranging from curriculum design negotiated jointly with staff, to participation in policy and strategy development.

Quality system: Covers any formal or informal quality enhancement or quality assurance policy or process used by a higher education provider.

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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 QUALITY & CORE/COMMON PRACTICES
Courses are well-designed, provide a high-quality academic experience for all students and enable a student's achievement to be reliably assessed.
The provider actively engages students, individually and collectively, in the quality of their educational experience.
The provider engages students individually and collectively in the development, assurance and enhancement of the quality of their educational experience.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES	UNIVERSITY PRACTICES	SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION
GUIDING PRINCIPLES		
1. Student engagement through partnership working is integral to the culture of higher education, however and wherever provision is delivered - student engagement is led strategically, but widely owned. • Partnership working is a key concept for student engagement in higher education – students and staff fulfil mutually important roles in shaping the student	The University and it's Students Association - AUSA committed to a Student Partnership Agreement. The agreement which was based on a set of core themes to support organisational objectives, continuity but allowed for annual updates in line with Sabbatical priorities. Since its inception we have benefited from increase collaboration and coordination of projects to support the student experience. Some highlights include: • Increased collaboration on student priorities • Coordinated communications principals • Launch of Student Mental Health Agreement	Student Partnership Agreement (Document) Student Engagement (Webpage) Student Feedback Form (Webpage) Engaging Student in Quality Processes (Webpage) Excellence Awards (Webpage) Student Mental Health Agreement (SHMA)

experience that enables staff and students to recognise and value the impact of student engagement in enhancement and quality assurance.

- By fostering a culture of mutual respect, openness and sharing of information, providers can benefit from the insights, views and effective engagement of students. Where they exist, providers work with their students' representative body (such as students' union/association/guild) to set mutual goals and desired outcomes from student engagement activity at a strategic level, to orientate students and staff towards a shared understanding of success.

- Providers in partnership with their student body should determine how the partnership will work in the context of their own institution. For example, in some providers the students' representative body is the primary vehicle for achieving partnership in institution-wide activities. In others, formal representative structures for partnership working may be embedded throughout.

Despite these achievements it has been recognised that the current format of the Partnership Agreement is administrative heavy. Many of the outcomes would have been achieve without the agreement through existing cross institutional working groups.

The University and AUSA, who benefit from a close working relationship have agreed to use 2022 as a period of post Covid reflection to consider alternative Student Partnership agreements models which will lead to more meaningful and tangible benefits to the student body.

A joint working group has been established to undertake this work. The group will reflect on the achievements of the SPA to date in the context of other working groups.

The University places strong emphasis on the involvement of students on committees and in decision making thus helping to shape the student experience. Each School has an AUSA 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 either informally or via the Staff-Student Liaison Committee. 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. survey results) and other matters relating to the wider student experience. At a University level, AUSA representatives are also full members of all Education committees including the University Education Committee and and its sub-committees with Senate which is the University's main academic decision-making body, the University Court, our Governing Body and the University Management Group. Additionally, the Principal and members of Senior Management meeting regularly with AUSA Sabbaticals ensuring close partnership working between the University and AUSA.

The University, AUSA and the newly appointed Rector meet regularly to identify, discuss and respond to themes arising from student interaction.

	The Principal's Excellence Awards are an annual celebration of the outstanding achievements of University of Aberdeen staff and students with student nominations being a core strand of these awards. In January 2022, a new Student Mental Health Agreement (SHMA) was approved and launched with a two-year action plan in place. The agreement outlines Aberdeen University Students Association (AUSA) and The University of Aberdeen's (UoA) commitment to improving the mental wellbeing of all students.	
2. Higher education providers, in partnership with their student body, define, promote, monitor and evaluate the range of opportunities to enable all students to engage in quality assurance and enhancement processes. • Higher education providers ensure that students and staff can define, own and promote the full range of opportunities for student engagement in quality assurance and enhancement processes. • Providers regularly monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of their approach to student engagement. Students play an active role in these monitoring and evaluation activities, including identifying appropriate key performance indicators to be used to measure progress, and demonstrable enhancements to the educational experience.	Engaging students in their learning is crucial to the quality of the University's teaching and learning provision and the overall student experience. We have several formalised opportunities in which students can become involved with quality processes and provide feedback on their experience, in order to both influence their own period of study and also that of future students. Student feedback is also a key component of the University's processes of monitoring and evaluation. The University use Course Feedback Forms to seek views from students on their academic experience. These forms seek feedback on what they have liked about the course and what they have not liked together with areas of good practice. This process provides valuable feedback to course coordinators to inform review of their course and to identify any changes requiring to be made for the next year. The feedback from this process informs the Annual Course and Programme Review process. experience To help us make the UoA student experience even better students are offered a wide range of opportunities to provide feedback on their overall University experience such as Filling in a survey, join a focus group, coming along to an open session or fill in our online feedback form. In terms of wider student feedback, the Aberdeen Student Experience Survey and the National Student Survey (NSS) are used to gauge student feedback on the wider student experience. The surveys allow the	Give Feedback on your Courses (Webpage) Become an Academic Representative (Webpage) University Committees (Webpage) Academic Quality Handbook (Webpage) Student-Staff Liaison Committees (Document) Course Evaluation Forms (Webpage) Aberdeen Student Experience Survey (Webpage) NSS (Webpage) Student Feedback (Webpages) Student Experience (Webpages)

University to enhance and improve their services based on the feedback provided.

All of this is relayed to students by means of 'You Said: We Did' messaging, which helps to close the feedback loop.

Class or Academic Representatives are elected student volunteers chosen by their fellow students who function as a vital link between staff and students, fostering and maintaining open dialogue to improve the students learning experience. They work together with staff throughout the year and have the opportunity to feedback at Student-Staff Liaison Committee (SSLC) meetings that are normally held once or twice a term.

As noted in section 1 above, student membership of formal committees and more informal working or task and finish groups is important in the transparency and engagement of students. The University includes students on all Education Committees and has students on Committees of the highest level. Some examples include the University Education Committee and its sub-committees, Aberdeen 2040 Education Task & Finish Groups and other working groups including the EDI Events and Engagement Group and the Student Communication working group. The remit and composition of these groups are reviewed regularly with student input. Students are also integral members of panels reviewing Academic Appeals and Student Complaints.

Students are invited to consult and feedback, through survey, focus groups and face to face interaction on a wide range of enhancement activities. Most recently the Pastoral Support Review, Wellbeing Strategy and Peer support development project.

The Academic Quality Handbook contains the University's policies, procedures and regulations relating to all aspects of teaching and learning, including research degrees at the University of Aberdeen. This includes details of how students can engage in quality assurance and enhancement processes

3. Effective student engagement supports enhancements, innovation and transformation in the community within and outside the provider, driving improvements to the experience of students. Student engagement can produce changes that help build a dynamic and inclusive learning community. A provider-wide approach will demonstrate multiple student engagement activities at all levels. Providers demonstrate how approaches to student engagement drive enhancements to the educational experience at each level. Within the institution, student-led approaches may look at issues and approaches to the curriculum, the wider learning environment, student service delivery and policy development. Outside the provider, student partnership activities might focus on initiatives such as widening access, or community and employer engagement.	As noted in section 1 above, the University works in close partnership with the Aberdeen University Students' Association (AUSA). The University adopts a holistic approach to feedback (see section 2 above), recognising that both academic and non-academic matters contribute to the overall student experience. Through gathering regular and detailed feedback enables us to monitor, develop and improve the student experience and gain valuable insight of our student voice. There is strong recognition of the importance of ensuring that there is closure of the feedback loop to provide assurance to the student body that the University takes their feedback seriously and that it is used to inform enhancements (see section 7 below). The Aberdeen Student Experience Survey provides students with the opportunity to tell us about their experience as a student at the University of Aberdeen, each academic year; what we have done well, and what we can improve on in the future. Student membership of committees and Task & Finish Groups also ensures students are actively able to inform and contribute to decision making in regard to enhancements made to the student experience (see section 2 above).	Student Partnership Agreement (Document) Pastoral Support and Guidance (Webpage) Aberdeen Student Experience Survey (Webpage) You Said, We Did (Webpage)
4. Arrangements exist for effective representation of the collective student voice at all organisational levels	Student membership of formal committees and more informal working or task and finish groups is important in the transparency and engagement of students. The University includes students on all Education Committees and has students on Committees of the highest level (see section 1 above).	Student Experience (Webpage) Rectorial Election (Webpage) Representation at AUSA (Webpage) Class Representative (Webpage)

including decision-making bodies. Providers work with their student body and students' representative body (such as students' union, association or guild) to ensure there are mechanisms in place at all levels to allow for the collective view of students to inform and shape the student experience. Collective student engagement involves students considering, deliberating, and developing informed views, independent from the provider, which are representative of the wider student body. Collective engagement will happen primarily through student representative structures such as course/class/faculty representatives, and where they exist through the students' representative body.	The Aberdeen University Students' Association (AUSA) elects five sabbatical officers each year to take forward a series of priorities as campaigned in their manifesto to represent students and the student voice. Sabbatical Officers work with colleagues at AUSA and within the University to achieve their manifesto priorities and have a role in representing students at University-level discussions. The role of the class representatives and School Convenors is also important in the collective student voice, ensuring that concerns are relayed to Schools, and therefore the University, by means of open forum and Student-Staff Liaison Committees. School Conveners also serve as members of School Education Committees ensuring the student voice is able to inform decision making. Students are invited to consult and feedback, through survey, focus groups and face to face interaction on a wide range of enhancement activities. This feedback is shared with the respective working group to inform each project. The Rector of the University of Aberdeen is elected by registered students. Their main role is to work closely with AUSA, the Students' Association to bring student concerns to the attention of University management.	
5. Providers recognise and respond to the diversity of their student body in the design and delivery of student engagement, partnership working and representation processes. Providers ensure that approaches to student engagement and representation are designed to include the diversity of their student body, identifying and removing barriers to participation,	The University is fully committed to equality, diversity, and inclusion. We take an innovative and proactive approach to embedding and mainstreaming the principles of equality, diversity and creating an inclusive environment for work and study which celebrates the diversity of our staff and students. As part of the University Aberdeen 2040 Strategy, inclusivity is a key strand and incorporates equality of opportunity and accessibility for all students. The University's vision for Equality & Diversity is "To strive to create an inclusive culture which celebrates the diversity of the University's staff and students. In recognising that this diversity brings new and engaging perspectives and enriches the experience of all who work, study and visit the University, we will take a proactive approach to	Aberdeen 2040 Strategy (Webpage) Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (Webpage) (Students) Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (Webpage) (Staff) Support for Online Students (Webpage) Qatar Campus (Webpage) Transnational Campuses (Webpage) Inclusivity and Accessibility in Education Framework (Webpage) Equality Impact Assessments (Webpage)

to ensure that the full diversity of student voices can contribute to enhancement and assurance activities. Consideration is given to students' modes of study, the composition and demographic of the student population, and the different backgrounds that students have, to ensure effective engagement and representation.	embedding and mainstreaming the principles of Equality and Diversity." The EDI policy supports this work. The University operates Equality Impact Assessments to ensure that no group is unduly discriminated against and to ensure activities are carried out in a fair and transparent way. All new policies should be reviewed by means of Equality Impact Assessments to ensure they are fit for purpose in an inclusive environment. The University has developed a Framework for Accessibility and Inclusion in Education (see 2 above). This encompasses all aspects of equality, diversity and inclusion in the student experience, ensuring all students are supported to study. Our fully online students, both those studying at a programme level and those taking a short course, have access to the same opportunities that on campus students do. We work closely with colleagues at our campus in Qatar and at our Joint Institute with South China Normal University, and other international partners, to ensure students studying at campuses overseas have the same opportunities and support. The EDI Events and Engagement Group exists to facilitate the delivery of an annual programme of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) events and engagement activities to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee. The group is made up of University and AUSA staff along with representatives from all of the Staff and Student forums.	
6. Student engagement and representation processes are adequately resourced and supported.	The University actively contributes to the induction of new Aberdeen University Students' Association (AUSA) Sabbatical Officers to ensure they are appropriately appraised of University policies and procedures, their role on committees and that they can establish effective working relationships with relevant University staff.	Representation at AUSA (Webpage) Class Rep Training 2021/22 – AUSA Skills Hub (Webpage) Star Award (University Careers Service) (Webpage) Enhanced Transcripts (Webpage)

• Effective student engagement requires clearly identified resourcing at a strategic level. Students and staff benefit from induction and ongoing training and support relating to student engagement. • Providers offer and evaluate the training and support provided to ensure it is appropriate for the role. The students' representative body requires adequate resource to lead on facilitating student academic representation, and providers often work with them on the delivery of induction and training activities. Consideration is given to ensuring training supports students to develop informed views, independent from the provider, which are representative of the wider student body.	AUSA provides comprehensive training and support for class representatives. A suite of online resources are available AUSA representatives who serve on Internal Teaching Review panels or as members of Appeals, Complaints and Discipline panels are provided with training in the same way as that provided to academic staff members of these bodies. Similarly, all student members of Senate receive induction into their role. The STAR (Students Taking Active Roles) Award is a co-curricular initiative available to students at both the Aberdeen and Qatar campuses. It allows students to assess, enhance and gain recognition for the skills they develop through any unpaid role of responsibility on or off campus. The University's Enhanced Transcript recognises not just a student's academic achievements but also recognises co-curricular activities such as the STAR award and AUSA Committee roles.	
7. Providers work in partnership with the student body to close the feedback loop. All stakeholders are clear about their role in the dissemination of feedback related to the student experience. Providers recognise and promote joint recognition and value of enhancements made to the student educational experience, and the contribution of students in achieving these successes.	The University places great value on student feedback in its processes of monitoring and evaluation, both in regard to our academic provision and more widely in regard to the overall student experience. There is strong recognition of the importance of ensuring that there is closure of the feedback loop to provide assurance to the student body that the University takes their feedback seriously and that it is used to inform enhancements. In an academic context, discussion at Staff-Student Liaison Committees takes account feedback provided through Course Feedback Forms and the wider content which is used to inform Annual Course Review (ACR). Class representatives and School Convener membership of SSLCs ensures students are able to contribute to discussion and decision-making arising from this feedback. Minutes of SSLCs are made available to all students ensuring closure of the feedback loop.	You Said, We Did (Webpage) Course Evaluation (Webpage)

Providers devise effective and appropriate ways of communicating with students how, when and where their feedback has been used and acted upon. Where action is not taken in response to student feedback, the rationale for this decision should be effectively communicated to students.	More informal means of feedback e.g. mid-course questionnaires or use of focus groups are used to collect early feedback. This approach provides the opportunity for changes to be made during the delivery of the course in response to this feedback enabling the current cohort to benefit. In regard to the wider student experience, the outcomes of the various feedback opportunities including student surveys are advised to students by means of the 'You Said, We Did' Campaign, which assists the closure of the feedback loop. A webpage provides examples of changes made covering areas including student support, digital experience and supporting your learning in response to student feedback.	