

Summary

Quality in higher education refers to how well providers support students to consistently achieve positive outcomes in learning, personal development and career advancement, while meeting the reasonable expectations of those students, employers, government and society in general.

Indicators of high quality might include:

- Staff and students are professionally and academically thriving
- The learning experience is relevant and challenging
- Everyone within a provider seeks to improve quality
- All students get a fair chance
- External expertise is sought and used
- Assessment is a tool to support and evidence learning
- Students are partners in the academic experience
- Students progress onto meaningful futures

More detail on the definition and associated indicators can be found below. The implementation of these indicators will look different across the sector due to the diversity of provision.

Definition of quality

Quality in higher education refers to how well providers support students to consistently achieve positive outcomes in learning, personal development and career advancement, while meeting the reasonable expectations of those students, employers, government and society in general.

By *positive outcomes*, we mean evidence which demonstrates learning and progression by the student that is both meaningful for them and meets reasonable expectations - for example, a graduate can access a profession previously unavailable to them.

By *reasonable expectations*, we mean provision enables an experience and outcome that plausibly benefits the student and wider society, both during and after their study - for example, graduates finish their course with a certain standard of knowledge and skills.

Indicators of high quality

High quality provision can include, but is not limited to, the following indicators:

Staff and students are professionally and academically thriving

Staff and students are trained, resourced, supported and developed in both course-specific and broader professional, academic and interpersonal skills

For example, students studying, and staff teaching, STEM courses have the appropriate lab and technical resources and are supported to develop the skills needed to use these effectively and safely.

The learning experience is relevant and challenging

Teaching is current, rigorous and purposeful, students are encouraged to learn and reflect independently, and there is clear alignment between content, delivery methods and learning outcomes

For example, the curriculum is representative of up-to-date scholarship, teaching and learning practices and relevant professional/industry standards, with the appropriate balance of breadth and depth of content and a range of delivery methods utilised where appropriate.

Everyone within a provider seeks to improve quality

A culture of continuous improvement runs through a provider, with monitoring and evaluation embedded

For example, course outputs and outcomes are monitored as part of everyday practice and the learnings from such monitoring are used to drive improvements.

All students get a fair chance

Students experience no unnecessary barriers, with all elements of the student journey fair, transparent, consistent and proportionate

For example, admissions processes use fair, reliable and appropriate methods to select students with the potential to complete their course successfully.

External expertise is sought and used

External expertise is employed effectively to protect standards and assure validity, durability and mobility of qualifications

For example, external examiners with relevant professional expertise provide assurance that students' achievements are in line with national frameworks and other UK providers.

Assessment is a tool to support and evidence learning

Assessment supports students to apply the knowledge and skills learned in a relevant context, aiding students' learning, effectively measuring against learning outcomes in an accurate and consistent manner and encouraging academic integrity

For example, students are given opportunities to practise subject-related skills and knowledge ahead of assessments and are given timely, understandable and constructive feedback to support their progression and achievement.

Students are partners in the academic experience

All students, irrespective of personal characteristics, location, mode of delivery, level of study, or subject, are meaningfully engaged and have the opportunity to be part of decisions that affect the learning experience.

For example, formal structures of student representation, such as course and faculty representatives, exist across the provider to enable students to be part of changes and improvements to the student experience.

Students progress onto meaningful futures

Measurement of outcomes demonstrates progression in learning abilities, interpersonal skills and career advancement

For example, post-graduation, a significant proportion of students report satisfaction in the career, study, or alternative they have progressed onto.

Disclaimer

This definition is intended as a tool for policymakers and others seeking an explanation of what is meant by quality in higher education in the UK. The list of indicators is not exhaustive, and the stated examples are just one illustration of what the indicator might look like in practice.

The application of this definition, and weighting of indicators, will look different across the diverse range of providers in the UK higher education sector and the various programmes and level of study they offer. Definitions of quality may also look different in other countries and jurisdictions. The indicators are listed in no particular order.

Though value for money is an important factor in perceptions of quality, this definition focuses on quality of provision outside of those perceptions.

For a more in-depth, technical definition of higher education quality, see [QAA's UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#).