

Response from the University and College Union (UCU)

The University and College Union (UCU) is the largest trade union and professional association for academics, lecturers, trainers, researchers and academic-related staff working in further and higher education throughout the UK. We welcome the opportunity to respond to the consultation on chapter B3 ('learning and teaching') as part of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education. In particular, we would like to focus on the indicators relating to staffing and resources.

Learning and teaching – overview

We welcome the chapter on learning and teaching, particularly the focus on partnership working between students and staff enabling 'active and independent learners'. The general principle is particularly important as policy reforms implemented in higher education move the system toward a consumer model featuring both higher tuition fees payable by individual learners and competition between institutions for students (and therefore fee income). This could give rise to an 'anti-learning' expectation (of spoon-feeding information, of guaranteed good grades and so on) from students who now act as consumers purchasing an education. For QAA to explicitly state that students are responsible for effectively using their learning opportunities is therefore critical for maintaining the integrity of the learning and teaching process in HE within the context of wider policy reforms.

The Expectation

Do you agree with the wording of the Expectation for this chapter?

No, in the current draft the word staff is missing from the Expectation. The wording of the Expectation needs to reflect more closely the general principle¹, i.e. a partnership between students and *staff*. We, therefore, suggest replacing the current draft with the following 'Higher education providers, working in partnership with their students and staff...'

Indicators 1-4: Enabling effective and independent learners (Pages 10-14)

We welcome a specific indicator on ensuring equality of opportunity. However, it is difficult to see how staff or higher education providers will be able to eliminate discriminatory behaviour. Instead, it is more realistic to expect staff to *challenge* discriminatory behaviour and suggest altering the wording in the second paragraph to reflect this (p.7).

We also suggest changing the phrase 'education for sustainability' to '*education for sustainable development*' as this more accurately reflects the emerging agenda in higher education.

In indicator 3 we welcome the notion of evidence-informed CPD, and in particular, the emphasis on the research, scholarship and professional practice that underpins teaching in higher education.

However, UCU's experience, particularly in further education, is of a much less inclusive notion of CPD. For example, in some further education colleges senior managers have cited health and safety training as an example of CPD for lecturers. Similarly, in higher education institutions, hourly-paid lecturers

¹ 'Learning is a partnership between students (who actively engage in a variety of learning activities) and **staff** (who provide learning opportunities and support and who recognise the diverse needs of their students' (p. 2, emphasis added).

are effectively denied access to proper training and CPD, mainly on the grounds that they are not paid to attend such courses.

UCU will continue to demand that HE in FE staff have comprehensive access to remitted time away from teaching to engage in necessary scholarly activity and research that will deepen and update both their subject knowledge and pedagogy to consistently underwrite a high quality learning experience for all HE in FE students. We will also continue to push for hourly-paid staff to be paid to attend training and professional development courses.

Indicators 8-10: Facilitating and supporting effective learning and teaching (pages 13-18)

We support the overarching goal of the indicator: 'Staff involved in teaching and supporting student learning are qualified, supported, and adequately resourced'.

One of the best ways of achieving this indicator is to ensure that the recognised trade unions are involved in the recruitment, appointment, promotion and capability procedures of an institution. To give one specific example, UCU has been working hard to ensure that there is a proper academic career path for staff posts where the responsibilities are primarily to cover essential teaching and/or clinical needs (i.e. the importance of recognising the 'Teaching and Scholarship' Academic Role Profile).

Indicator 8 needs to be updated to reflect the changes in relation to the Institute for Learning (IfL).

We welcome the reference to 'accessible, adequate and appropriate' resources in indicator 10. However, we are concerned that direct public funding for teaching is being heavily cut and that the funding available to individual institutions will vary even more greatly than it does now. We believe that this will threaten the quality of staff-student interaction, and in particular the space for formative feed-back and tailored support to individual students.

Reduced public funding for teaching is also likely to have a detrimental impact on the levels of support services required to underpin student retention, progression, achievement, and subsequent employment.

Another problem with the new funding regime is that the competition for fee-paying customers amongst institutions undermines the core teaching and research mission of the university and shifts resources into less appropriate activities such as commercial marketing, aggressive student recruitment and public relations.

Finally, we recommend that QAA auditors should talk to local UCU reps as part of the institutional review process. Staff reps will be crucial in allowing QAA to gain a genuine understanding of the quality processes and the problems staff experience with them, especially in further education colleges.