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Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education: Career education, information and guidance

Foreword

1 This document is a code of practice for career education, information and guidance in UK higher education institutions. It is one of a suite of inter-related documents which, taken together, will form an overall *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* for the guidance of higher education institutions subscribing to the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (the QAA).

2 The overall *Code* and its constituent sections are being prepared by the QAA in response both to the Reports of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education and its Scottish Committee (the 'Dearing' and 'Garrick' Reports) and the consequent remodelling of the national arrangements for quality assurance in higher education. The completed *Code* will identify a comprehensive series of system-wide expectations covering matters relating to the management of academic quality and standards in higher education. In so doing, it will provide an authoritative reference point for institutions as they consciously, actively and systematically assure the academic quality and standards of their programmes, awards and qualifications. The *Code* will assume that, taking into account nationally agreed principles and practices, each institution has its own systems for independent verification both of its quality and standards and of the effectiveness of its quality assurance systems. In developing the *Code*, extensive advice is being sought from a range of knowledgeable practitioners.

3 Each section of the *Code* is structured into a series of precepts and accompanying outline guidance. The precepts identify those key matters that the QAA expects an institution to be able to demonstrate it is addressing effectively through its own quality assurance mechanisms. The accompanying outline guidance is provided to assist institutions in maintaining and enhancing the quality of provision for students and other stakeholders. The guidance is not intended to be either prescriptive or exhaustive: its purpose is to offer a framework for quality assurance and control which institutions may wish to use and adapt according to their own needs, traditions, cultures and decision-making processes. Nonetheless, in many institutions the guidance will constitute appropriate good practice.

4 To assist users, the precepts are listed, without the associated guidance, in Appendix 1 to the code.

5 During the course of its quality assurance reviews, the QAA will consider the extent to which individual institutions are meeting the expectations of the precepts in the available sections of the *Code of practice*. The QAA will report on how effectively

higher education institutions individually are meeting these expectations and are discharging their responsibilities for the academic standards and quality of their programmes and awards. In doing so it will focus on the precepts themselves, and not on the associated guidance: the latter may, however, provide a helpful starting point for discussion. The QAA expects that one year from the date of publication all institutions will be able to demonstrate that they are adhering to the precepts.

Introduction

6 The *Code of Practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education: Career education, information and guidance (CEIG)* is intended to help higher education institutions to ensure both that they are meeting students' expectations in respect of their preparedness for their future career, and that they are producing graduates equipped to meet the demands of the employment market of today and tomorrow. It does so by seeking to ensure that institutions have a strategy for CEIG that is adequately quality assured.

7 The CEIG code will complement other QAA developments including the *Code of practice* on placement learning and the guidance produced by the QAA in respect of programme specification and progress files.

8 The employment market is changing in ways which make it more important than ever for students and graduates to take personal responsibility for managing their own career development throughout life. For this they need to develop the skills to manage their own career including the abilities to reflect and review, to plan and make decisions, to use information resources effectively, to create and to take opportunities, and to make provision for lifelong learning. Career guidance is one essential component of the overall support which students need. There is, however, an important interrelationship between career education, information and guidance and the development of employability and career management skills. The role of higher education career services has been expanding in response to these trends and the scope of this code therefore encompasses career education and information, as well as guidance.

9 Both the nature of employment and the way in which the employment market functions are undergoing ever more rapid, technology-led change. The range of opportunities taken up by graduates is now broader than ever; their career patterns are more varied, less predictable and more volatile; and the nature of the student population in higher education is becoming more diverse and more representative of society as a whole. The choices which students face are becoming less certain and more complex. There is therefore a critical need to prepare students to face the future, and for CEIG provision to be forward-looking and innovative.

10 The role of technology - in particular Information and Communications Technology (ICT) - is becoming critical to the provision of effective CEIG. The future quality of CEIG will therefore be increasingly dependent upon a strategy for resourcing and quality assurance which includes ICT. Such a strategy will need to encompass the planned use, in an integrated way, of both ICT and human resources (including recruitment, training and development of staff).

11 Students in higher education need clarity about their entitlements to CEIG, and confidence in the student-centred values underpinning the provision of CEIG. The expansion and diversification of higher education makes it all the more important that such provision is underpinned by a commitment to equality of opportunity and

of access to CEIG provision, and to meeting the needs of students from diverse backgrounds and students engaged in different modes of study, including part-time and distance learning.

12 The career preparation of graduates is important not only to students themselves but also to their families, to employers, to Government, to the tax-payer and to the economic prosperity of the country. These various stakeholders are entitled to expect that the provision of CEIG is quality assured with the same rigour as other aspects of academic provision. It is in the interests of institutions themselves to adopt transparent quality standards which are appropriate to this area of higher education activity.

13 This section of the *Code* also stresses the importance of integration, coherence and internal collaboration as part of an institution-wide commitment to preparing students for their future career. This should be reflected in the institution's teaching and learning strategy and should include links between CEIG services and academic departments, personal tutors, admission tutors, placement tutors, student employment job shops, and other student support and welfare services.

14 This code recognises that a dedicated career service is not the only appropriate way of providing CEIG. In some monotechnics, especially where there are strong and specific vocational links, a dedicated career service may not be the best form of provision. This code does, however, identify in its precepts the minimum features which it would expect any set of procedures to be able to demonstrate.

15 Institutions vary in their focus and orientation towards external relations, partnerships, and markets, and this may be reflected in both their student intake and the destinations of their graduates. It is important therefore that a relationship of collaboration and partnership exists between providers of CEIG and external agencies and organisations locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally, which is appropriate to, and supportive of, the institution's role and mission.

16 If CEIG, as well as the employability aspects of course content and of curriculum-based skills development, are to be relevant and up-to-date, then they must be informed by accurate labour market information and by the experience and perspective of employers. This is especially important in the context of a rapidly changing employment market. Systems and procedures should therefore be in place to ensure that these feedback loops operate effectively both at the level of CEIG provision, including staff development and training, and of curriculum design and programme specification.

17 These are the key themes which are reflected in the precepts and guidelines which make up this section of the *Code*.

Glossary

Career education, information and guidance (CEIG). An amalgam of processes, facilities and opportunities designed to enable individuals to prepare for, and make effective decisions about, their roles in present and future labour markets. It encompasses personal transferable skills, development and articulation, self-assessment and personal review, labour market information, career goal setting and decision making, action planning, and the communication and self-presentation skills necessary for career management. CEIG services/provision may be delivered through a dedicated career service (see below), or by other means.

Career education. A range of teaching and learning activities associated with career preparation, development and planning.

Career information. A coordinated provision of print, electronic and personal contact resources designed to enable users to develop an accurate factual and subjective understanding of occupations, of employment types, sectors and employing organisations, and of employment, further study and training opportunities.

Career guidance. A process - whether delivered individually, in groups, or via hard copy or electronic media - which aims to help individuals to a clearer understanding of their career development needs and potential, to an appreciation of the processes of career planning and decision-making, and to clarify and attain their career objectives.

Dedicated career services/ CEIG provision and dedicated CEIG staff. Specialist services, processes and staff which are provided by a higher education institution expressly for the purpose of career education, information and guidance.

Employment. Includes self-employment.

Opportunity providers. Individuals and organisations providing students and graduates with opportunities for employment, work-related experience, further study, voluntary work and other structured opportunities for personal development.

Statement of service. A formal statement which both documents the CEIG services to be provided, including the standards to be applied, and also defines the client groups entitled to them (students, graduates, employers and other internal and external 'customers'). It may also include statements of the responsibilities of clients as well as their entitlements.

Graduate destinations. The situation or status, in respect of employment or other activity, of graduates at a certain time interval after leaving higher education study or research. Most commonly used in the context of 'First Destinations' data and statistics which are collected by higher education institutions, and collated and published on a UK-wide basis by the Higher Education Statistics Agency.

Precepts and guidance

General principles

1

The institution should have a clear, documented and accessible policy for career education, information and guidance (CEIG), including statements of the institution's objectives and of students' entitlements and responsibilities.

2

CEIG provision should be impartial, client-focused, confidential, collaborative, accessible and in accordance with the institution's equal opportunities policy.

3

CEIG provision should be subject to the institution's quality assurance procedures.

4

The institution should seek to identify and cater for the special needs of students who may be disadvantaged in the labour market.

Institutions should consider:

- ensuring that statements of service make clear who is responsible for the delivery of different aspects of CEIG, including definitions of the role of academic staff and the expert contribution of any dedicated career service staff;
- providing explicit statements of service that set out clearly and concisely how their CEIG provision is intended to meet the individual needs of students;
- the extent to which their policy on equal opportunities is integrated with their career provision to avoid discriminatory practices which disadvantage individuals, or groups of students;
- how best to make CEIG provision, as detailed in their statement of service, available to all students including part-time/overseas/distance-learning students/students based on different campuses;
- implementing procedures to support a collaborative approach, which strengthens and supports links with relevant internal contacts (eg other student service staff, academic staff etc) and with relevant external organisations (eg career companies in the public and private sector, other guidance and counselling services, adult guidance networks, further education sector etc);
- the adoption of national quality standards for CEIG services, such as those of the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) and/or the Guidance Council;
- the impact of relevant statutory requirements or UK-wide and regional policy on CEIG provision.

Institutional context

5

The institution should ensure that its CEIG provision is designed to prepare its students for a successful transition to employment or further study and for effective management of their career thereafter.

6

The institution should ensure that CEIG interests are represented in appropriate internal decision-making forums.

7

CEIG should be promoted internally, with mechanisms in place to support and encourage collaboration with academic and other appropriate departments for the benefit of students.

Institutions should consider:

- integrating CEIG within the curriculum for all higher education programmes of study, eg through incorporating CEIG into their learning and teaching strategies; and making explicit the links between CEIG and a particular programme of study by means of the programme specification;
- ensuring that CEIG providers have effective and appropriate mechanisms for referring students, should it be necessary, to other internal or external expert sources of information and assistance;
- promoting understanding and mutual support for the distinctive and complementary roles of CEIG, academic and other appropriate staff through, for example, staff development;
- Adopting the HE Progress File initiative developed by Universities UK (formerly CVCP)/SCOP/Universities Scotland (formerly COSHEP) and the QAA.

Students

8

Students should be provided with information on the services available to them while registered at the institution and those which will continue to be available to them when they have left.

9

The institution should make clear in its information to prospective and present students how the skills and knowledge acquired during study are intended to be of use to them in the development of their careers.

Institutions should consider:

- promoting the importance of skills development for students in relation to employment and lifelong learning through, for example, progress files;
- making reference to statements of transferable abilities contained in relevant subject benchmark statements;
- ensuring that responsibilities for providing references for students, including their format coverage and quality, are clearly located and effectively discharged;
- how best to promote CEIG provision as detailed in the statement of service to part-time/overseas/distance-learning students/e-learning students/students based on different campuses;
- how best to use new technologies to promote and deliver CEIG.

External relations

10

The institution should promote close collaboration between employers and CEIG providers to maximise the benefits to both students and employers.

11

The institution should ensure that its CEIG provision takes account of developments in the employment market and work opportunities in the community at large.

Institutions should consider:

- working with the core UK-wide professional career bodies, Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS); and The Higher Education Careers Service Unit (CSU), to help develop best practice;
- working with a range of professional and related bodies*;
- helping employers and other opportunity providers to publicise information about their organisations and about their opportunities for learning and work in a manner consistent with precept 2;
- maximising and promoting the value of work experience and work-related learning to both students and employers;
- developing ways to provide an effective exchange of information and improving understanding between employers, other opportunity providers, and staff delivering CEIG;

* For example: The Guidance Council; The Welsh Higher Education Career Service; Institute of Careers Guidance; and Association of Careers Advisers in Colleges of Higher Education.

- extending the CEIG network to include external resources such as employers and alumni who can, for example, offer insights into employer expectations and specialist career information;
- disseminating, as appropriate, available labour market information to cover the local, national and international markets.

Staff

12

The institution should ensure that all members of its staff involved with CEIG provision, including academic staff, have the skills, knowledge and training appropriate to the role they are undertaking.

Institutions should consider:

- supporting any staff involved in the provision of CEIG in developing their relevant professional expertise through continuing professional development internally and externally;
- providing the training required for academic and other appropriate staff to fulfil their role in providing CEIG.

Monitoring, feedback, evaluation and improvement

13

Providers of CEIG services should be required to account formally and regularly for the quality and standards of their services with the objective of promoting continuous improvement.

14

The institution should ensure that data collected by the institution on graduate destinations informs its CEIG provision.

Institutions should consider:

- incorporating feedback from key stakeholders into CEIG provision;
- setting appropriate targets in order that success in the provision of CEIG, or otherwise, can be measured and used to promote continuous improvement;
- recording unmet requests made to the career service with a view to amending the statement of service and/or making changes in provision of services if appropriate;
- producing an annual report on the provision, performance and outcomes of the CEIG service. This should be publicised widely and considered in detail by the institution;

- collecting data, centrally and through academic departments, on graduate destinations that extends beyond the first destination requirements of statistical agencies;
- undertaking regular reviews of their CEIG policies, to include development, monitoring and resourcing.

Appendix 1

The precepts

(Note: The precepts are printed here without the guidance notes for ease of reference.)

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