

The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) - Code of Practice for Disabled Students

The UK's Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) (www.qaa.ac.uk) is a national body which has been established to ensure academic standards and quality are maintained within higher education. Part of the QAA's work has been developing a code of practice (www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/codeofpractice/) for higher education institutions to follow. One of the 10 sections of the code of practice (section 3), covers the issues of assessment and support for disabled students. It was first published in 2001 and was revised in spring 2010.

What is the code of practice for disabled students?

The *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Section 3: Disabled students)* is a policy document which provides a framework to enable all academic and professional services staff to consider the requirements of disabled people who wish to apply and subsequently study within higher education.

The code provides an explanation of how disability is defined within the UK today, by recognising that students have impairments and that they subsequently become disabled by the social, attitudinal or environmental barriers they face while accessing higher education (ie the code utilises the social model of disability). For example, higher education students with impairments might be disabled as a consequence of inaccessible areas of the physical environment or inaccessible specialist support.

The revised code is intended to reflect current disability legislation (the Disability Discrimination Acts and Disability Equality Duty), as well as the Equality Act 2010. The code also acknowledges that the involvement of disabled students could enhance the quality of provision.

The main part of the code of practice relating to disability is split into 21 precepts which cover the student life cycle, and will be relevant to all academic and professional staff. These precepts are listed in the Appendix to this briefing.

The various precepts are intended to provide a general statement of the principles - the detail in the documents provides explanation of how institutions would be expected to meet these obligations.

What does it mean for me as a member of staff?

The code of practice will have a slightly different meaning for each individual member of staff, depending on their role. For academic and professional services staff, the relevant precepts can act as a reminder to consider the requirements of disabled students, whether by providing disabled students with opportunities to demonstrate the achievement of learning outcomes or accessing specialist support.

The revised code proposes that support for disabled students be viewed as a general entitlement to education that meets the needs of each individual. To support this commitment, the code suggests that meeting the needs of disabled students should be viewed as being a core aspect of the overall service provided by UK institutions to their students.

To help staff understand what the revised code might mean for them, the QAA has developed a podcast to explain section 3 which can be downloaded from their website (www.qaa.ac.uk/podcasts/supdesstu10.asp).

What do I have if I have any questions?

If you have any questions about the QAA code of practice, you should discuss them with the Disability Advisor, Equality Advisor or Quality Assurance Manager at your institution.

Sources:

Quality Assurance Agency (February 2010, updated March 2010)
Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education - Section 3: Disabled students
www.qaa.ac.uk

Appendix

The QAA Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education Section 3: Disabled students - the 21 Precepts (March 2010).

General principles

1. The educational disadvantage and exclusion faced by many disabled people is not an inevitable result of their impairments or health conditions, but arises from social, attitudinal and environmental barriers. Institutions ensure that in all their policies, procedures and activities, including strategic planning and resource allocation, consideration is given to the removal of such barriers in order to enable disabled students to participate in all aspects of the academic and social life of the institution.

Institutional and strategic management

2. Senior managers, including those at the highest levels, lead their institution's development of inclusive policy and practice in relation to the enhancement of disabled students' experience across the institution.

Planning, monitoring and evaluation

3. Information is collected by institutions on disclosure of impairments and is used appropriately to monitor the applications, admissions and academic progress of disabled students.

4. Institutions operate systems to monitor the effectiveness of provision for disabled students, evaluate progress and identify opportunities for enhancement.

Continuing professional development

5. Institutions enable staff to participate in a range of continuing professional development activities in order to enhance their knowledge, reflect upon and develop their practice, and contribute towards a fully inclusive institutional culture.

Information for prospective students, current students and staff

6. The institution's publicity, programme details and general information are accessible and include explanations of how the entitlements of disabled students are met.

Admissions processes and policies

7. The operation of admissions processes and application of entry criteria include consideration of the duty to promote disability equality.

8. Disabled applicants' requirements are identified and assessed in an effective and timely way, taking into account the applicants' views.

Enrolment, registration and induction of students

9. Arrangements for enrolment, registration and induction of new entrants meet the entitlements of disabled students.

Curriculum design

10. The design of new programmes and the review and/or revalidation of existing programmes include assessment of the extent to which the programme is inclusive of disabled students.

Learning and teaching

11. Both the design and implementation of learning and teaching strategies and related activities, as well as the learning environment, recognise the entitlement of disabled students to participate in all activities provided as part of their programme of study.

Academic assessment

12. Academic assessment practices ensure that disabled students are given the opportunity to demonstrate the achievement of learning outcomes and competence standards.

Academic support for disabled students

13. Academic support and guidance are accessible and appropriate for disabled students.

Information and communication technology (ICT)

14. Institutions have in place the capacity to investigate the range of ways in which disabled students can be aided by ICT and to provide students and staff with the information to enable them to make the best use of assistive technologies.

Access to student services

15. Disabled students have access to the full range of student services that are provided by the institution.

Additional specialist support

16. Institutions ensure that there are sufficient designated members of staff with appropriate skills and experience to provide specialist advice and support to disabled applicants and students, and to the staff who work with them.

Careers education, information and guidance

17. Disabled students have access to careers education, information and guidance that supports their progression to employment or further study.

The physical environment

18. All students are able to access the physical environment in which they will study, learn, live and take part in the social life of their institution.

19. Institutions ensure that facilities and equipment are as accessible as possible to disabled students.

Institutional procedures



20. Institutions ensure that information about all policies and procedures that affect students' ability to complete their studies and assessments is available in accessible formats and communicated to students.

21. Institutions ensure that policies and procedures are operated in a way which does not lead to disadvantages to disabled students that arise from the nature of an impairment.