



The importance of quality assurance in education programmes

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1. What role does quality assurance play in education?

In primary and secondary education and higher education, there is a clear understanding and commitment to quality assurance (QA):

For schools, whilst the specific definition of QA may vary, the underlying principles strongly overlap. One useful definition provided by the [Guide to Quality Assurance in a Multi-Academy Trust](#) suggests, 'QA is the process of verifying that the education being provided by each of the academies meets the standards set by the Trust'. It also talks about QA being a process that sets out the expectations and should be related to curriculum, teaching and learning, assessment, resources, behaviour management and student welfare. QA activities are then built around ensuring these expectations are being met across the areas of work.

For universities, there is the national [Quality Code](#) from the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) which uses a framework that represents a shared understanding of what quality practice looks like in the UK higher education sector. It suggests organisations need to map their expectations of their work against their practices. As part of this, there are identified statements that a university should expect to achieve to be able to see if their programme of study is reaching its aims e.g., 'The provider actively engages students, individually and collectively in the quality of their educational experience' (QAA). This allows for an interrogation of the practices against these statements ([American Society for Quality](#)).

Importantly, in both school and university contexts, QA is distinct from quality control, with both being part of quality management. Specifically, QA is process-oriented – focusing on preventing quality issues, whereas quality control is focused on the quality of the end product.

QA is not just needed in schools and universities, but in broader education programmes as well, and especially when working with children from underrepresented or less advantaged backgrounds, where in order to close education inequalities we need programmes that consistently deliver outcomes for the students. In this blog, we explore how we embed QA in our work at The Brilliant Club.

2. Quality assurance at The Brilliant Club

QA underpins The Brilliant Club's programmes to ensure that we support students in the best ways possible to access university and succeed when they get there. We offer programmes to support school students, university students, parents and carers across a range of contexts and curricula, and many of our programmes are delivered by PhD tutors. Therefore, we need to ensure that we use the most effective QA processes that recognises the stakeholders that we serve and reflects the



complexities of the programmes we deliver. In what follows, we outline the key stages that underpins The Brilliant Club's QA work:

1. Theory of change
2. Curriculum design and development
3. Materials design
4. Training design and delivery

1. Theory of Change

To begin with, all our programmes have a theory of change which focus the development of a programme to specific and measurable outcomes. This forms the basis of any quality assurance work. A theory of change model describes the underlying assumptions about how planned activities will lead to intended outcomes ([Centre for Transforming Access and Outcomes in Higher Education](#)). Each of our programmes has a robust [theory of change model](#), that identifies the activities that are most likely to have the greatest impact on student outcomes.

2. Curriculum design and development

Our programmes are founded on a curriculum that enables the theory of change to be realised. They are designed to support the development of participants' self-efficacy, critical thinking and provide opportunities for deep learning. Through our QA work, there is a clear understanding of the journey being embarked on – it's length, breadth and depth needs to be constructed to ensure connections between different learnings. All curriculum development at The Brilliant Club starts with the following questions:

- What is the problem the programme is addressing?
- What is the programme trying to help participants to do?
- What is the starting point?
- What is the desired end point?
- Working backwards – what knowledge is required to get to the end point and what stage are there?
- What timeframe is there within the programme to achieve the aim? Evaluate its achievability.

3. Material design

The design of materials to be used in our programmes need to ensure that they will meet the needs of our participants, achieve the theory of change and cover the agreed curriculum. QA support is integral to this process and is built into the timeline for development. QA ensures that the following elements are explicit:

- Demonstrates a clear journey from a to b
- Is knowledge and vocabulary rich
- Is flexible for different contexts as appropriate
- Is explicit about learning opportunities and critical thinking
- Is accessible



- Has connections between ideas and concepts
- Is effectively sequenced and coherent

4. Training design and delivery

Finally, we ensure that the following areas of delivery are considered when designing the delivery of a curriculum:

Using questioning to deepen learning

- Tasks are an opportunity to share and discuss, not an end in themselves
- Questioning provides an opportunity to explain thinking process and decision making
- Questioning is used to provide opportunities for elaboration and debate

Maximising opportunities for learning and assessment or action

- Clear learning outcomes are given, identifying new learning and retrieval practice
- Structuring tasks that build learning in a manageable but challenging way
- Creating tasks that embed learning that require participants to practice and become secure in a new skill or with new knowledge

Creating an environment for critical and higher order thinking

- Scaffolding learning and modelling examples
- Encouraging participants to make connections between ideas and concepts
- Ensuring opportunities to consider why and how

Responsive to the learners' experiences and contributions

- Knowledge content is secure to allow for contributions from participants and flexibility in approach
 - Teaching will assess what participants already know through, for example, baseline assignments and discussion
- Session planning should include a range of individual, group, whole class and discussion work to allow for maximum engagement and responses from participants

Final reflections

Quality assurance of a programme of work is and should be iterative. It is never complete and requires ongoing interrogation of practices, processes and outcomes. To this end, we have embedded two core quality assurance processes across all our programmes:

- Annual reviews of each programme is a holistic review of the entire programme in conjunction with our rigorous programmatic evaluation of outcomes. As part of this annual review, each programme leader will complete a self-evaluation form (SEF) before the review period, identifying areas of strength and areas for improvement which will help to shape the



nature of the review. A high-quality review will not just look at the quality of a programme from the outside but will assess the perceptions of a programme team from the inside as well. This SEF follows the format of the key strands identified above.

- Deep dives into particular aspects of a programme occur where there is a specific need to examine an element of a programme. These are identified either by the programme themselves, or through the annual review. A deep dive may take the form of a series of, for example, observations of delivery followed by appropriate review or training, the development of a new curriculum, or an examination of the assessment or evaluation of the programme.

At the Brilliant Club, quality assurance is a collaborative process rather than an inspection. It is 'done with' not 'done to'. In all our programmes, any quality assurance will be a conversation with colleagues. The benefits of robust quality assurance processes on an organisation go beyond the confidence we can have in our programmes. Crucially, ensuring that quality assurance is a collaborative process, where colleagues understand the process and can contribute to it and, indeed, challenge findings, they able to develop their knowledge, skills further, which in turn enables us to maximise the impact of our programmes further.

ⁱ For clarity in this blog, we use the term participants to refer to the school students, university students, parents and carers who take part in our programmes.