

## Framework for the Management of Quality Assurance and Enhancement

### Aim

- 1 The overall aim of the University's framework for the management of quality assurance and enhancement (QA&E) is to demonstrate that the University's responsibility for awarding its own degrees is being satisfactorily discharged, and to ensure that the student experience is continuously improved.

### Objectives

- 2 The University seeks to achieve this aim by means of the following objectives:
  - a. to satisfy the University and external stakeholders that programmes of study and associated student support are of the highest possible quality
  - b. to demonstrate that awards meet threshold academic standards as set out by the requirements of the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education \(2014\)](#) and the European Standards and Guidelines (2015), and other relevant external benchmarks
  - c. to demonstrate a commitment not only to quality assurance but also to the enhancement of the quality of the student learning experience and to teaching excellence
  - d. to implement quality assurance and enhancement processes in an efficient and effective manner.

### Key terminology

- 3 **Quality assurance** - the process for checking that the academic standards and quality of higher education provision meet agreed expectations.
- 4 **Threshold academic standards** - the minimum acceptable level of achievement that a student has to demonstrate to be eligible for the award of academic credit or a qualification. For equivalent qualifications, the threshold level of achievement is agreed across the UK.
- 5 **Academic standards** - the standards that individual degree-awarding bodies set and maintain for the award of their academic credit or qualifications. These may exceed the threshold academic standards. They include the standards of performance that a student needs to demonstrate to achieve a particular classification of a qualification, such as a first-class honours degree classification in a certain subject or the award of merit or distinction in a master's degree.
- 6 **Academic quality** - how, and how well, the higher education provider supports students to enable them to achieve their award. It covers learning, teaching and assessment, and all the different resources and processes a provider puts in place to help students progress and fulfil their potential.
- 7 **Quality enhancement** - deliberate steps taken at provider level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities.

### Principles

- 8 University quality assurance and enhancement processes and activities are underpinned and shaped by a number of key principles. These are as follows:

- a. students should be engaged as participatory partners in the management of their experience
- b. processes should be informed by appropriate internal and external peer involvement, and by an understanding of risk awareness and risk management
- c. processes and activities should be evidence based and underpinned by the systematic generation and consideration of robust management information, and feedback from students, external examiners and advisors, and other stakeholders
- d. identifying good practice and opportunities for further improvement at strategic and operational levels
- e. result in actions that positively enhance the quality of student learning opportunities
- f. provide for frequent self-evaluation and reflection on the effectiveness of processes and impact on outcomes.

More specifically:

- 9 **Internal peer review** is an important basis for assuring and enhancing quality. For example, Institute Quality Committees include staff membership from within and outside of the host Institute, which provides a basis for sharing of effective practice, as well as an independent check for internal processes such as the annual evaluation of courses and the production of accurate and complete documentation for students.
- 10 **External peer review** provides an independent assessment of standards and quality, and is achieved in a number of ways, such as through external examiner reports which form a critical element of the annual evaluation process. Equally, all periodic review events involve external subject expertise as does the process for course planning and approval.
- 11 **Student engagement** is fundamental in informing the future development of programmes and the student experience, and is achieved through the range of student feedback and representation mechanisms as well as the involvement of students as partners in the processes for approval, monitoring and review.
- 12 An **evidence based** approach to enhancement-led quality assurance informs all key processes, drawing on an increasingly wide range of quantitative indicators and qualitative information to evaluate effectiveness, identify issues and inform planned action for improvement.
- 13 **Risk awareness** has become increasingly embedded in the key processes of approval, monitoring and review, and informs the work of the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee and Institute Quality Committees on an ongoing basis.
- 14 **Evaluation** is seen as fundamental both in the operation of key processes and their impact on student outcomes, most explicitly the annual evaluation process, and also in the ongoing review of the management and operation of such processes themselves.

### **Implementation of quality assurance and enhancement**

- 15 The **Academic Quality Unit** is responsible for the development, maintenance, implementation and evaluation of quality assurance and enhancement processes with the aim of ensuring that these are fully understood and implemented by staff delivering all programmes for which UW has the responsibility for quality assurance.
- 16 A range of programmes and opportunities are made available at University and

Institute levels to enable HE practitioners to enhance student engagement with the nature of learning in all forms, provide excellent inclusive learning, teaching and assessment, and to encourage reflection on practice and progress new developments.

- 17 The Board of Governors is responsible for making assurances to HEFCE/Office for Students about student academic experiences, student outcomes, and the standard of awards, based on the reports and action plans it receives from Academic Board.
- 18 The **Academic Board** in association with the Board of Governors is responsible for ensuring that the University's academic strategy is fit for purpose. It is responsible for the formal approval of academic policies and procedures, together with formal responsibility for the standards, quality and enhancement of academic provision within the University. Academic Board is also responsible for oversight of the organisation of learning and teaching, research, scholarship, standards, students and courses, and advising the Vice Chancellor on academic matters. Academic Board delegates some of these responsibilities to its subcommittees.
- 19 The **Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee (ASQEC)** is responsible, on behalf of Academic Board, for all aspects of academic quality assurance and enhancement to assure the quality and standards of the University's academic awards. It is supported in this work by the Institute Quality Committees.
- 20 The **Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Committee (LTSEC)** advises Academic Board on University strategy and policies to foster and encourage excellence in learning and teaching and the student experience, and to raise the external profile of the University in this area of its activity.
- 21 The **Academic Partnerships Committee (APC)** advises Academic Board, through the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee (ASQEC) on matters relating to the University's academic partnerships and collaborative provision.
- 22 The **Research Committee (RC)** advises Academic Board on the University's strategy and policies to foster and encourage research and to raise the external profile of the University in this area of its activity.
- 23 The **Academic Regulations and Governance Committee (ARGC)** advises Academic Board on matters relating to academic regulations and associated procedures and matters relating to effective academic governance, so as to ensure that the University applies principles of best practice and regulation.
- 24 All academic staff belong to an **Institute**. The Head of Institute is responsible for maintaining the standards, efficiency and good management of the Institute in accordance with University regulations, guidelines and codes of practice and for the maintenance of quality procedures and processes established by ASQEC on behalf of Academic Board. The Head of Institute maintains operational responsibility for the activity of the Institute and its curriculum. In each Institute there are designated senior members of staff who provide strategic leadership to assure the quality of subject provision, and promote academic development and learning and teaching initiatives. Institutes monitor their courses through the annual evaluation processes and are assisted in this work by an **Institute Quality Committee (IQC)** and an Institute Board.
- 25 **Course Teams** are responsible for the design, delivery and assessment of courses, and are required to monitor the standards and effectiveness of these courses and, via appropriate means (such as through the annual evaluation process), to seek to continuously improve the student experience.
- 26 **Course Management Committees** comprise elected student academic representatives and the teaching team. They meet each semester to review teaching and learning and the delivery, organisation and assessment of each course. The minutes of these

committees are kept as a formal record and made available to students.

## Quality Assurance and Enhancement Processes

- 27 **Approval of the development of new course proposals:** The Course Scrutiny Group (CSG) advises the Vice Chancellor and the Academic Board on the approval of the development of new course proposals within the context of the Strategic Plan and the likely resources available to the University.
- 28 **Course planning and approval:** The considerable expertise of the University with various forms of course approval and review has led to the adoption of the current model which balances the responsibilities of various members of the academic community at course, Institute and University level, and internal and external peers, who may offer advice, subject and contextual expertise, and ultimately make a judgement on the appropriateness of a new course proposal to be offered by the University or one or more of its partners.
- 29 **Course Modifications:** In addition to course approval, there are related procedures for modifications to courses, by which alterations can be made to approved provision. These apply to all taught courses offering a University award.
- 30 **Accreditation:** UW may accredit modules or short courses delivered by other organisations. These modules are subject to the quality mechanisms of the University.
- 31 **Periodic Review:** Periodic reviews are six-yearly events focused on academic departments, the main purposes of which are to review, evaluate and confirm arrangements for managing the academic standards of awards within a subject area, evaluating the quality of learning opportunities, and promoting quality enhancement, support reflective evaluation, and to enable and encourage the sharing of good practice.
- 32 **Partnership Approval:** A formal procedure exists for the approval of new partners. This includes consideration through a formal approval meeting as well as due diligence checks. A register of partners and collaborative provision is maintained and published by the University.
- 33 **Partnership Review:** The University operates a process of six-yearly review of partnerships whereby stakeholders from both the partner institution and UW meet to discuss the operation of the partnership and the quality management of the courses delivered with the partner. External participation is involved.
- 34 **Annual Evaluation:** Annual evaluation provides the institution with the evidence it requires to enable it to discharge its responsibility for the standard of each award made in its name, and to be assured that the quality of education provided for students is, at least, satisfactory. The process identifies issues requiring attention and a mechanism for ensuring that they are addressed, and brings forward examples of good practice, which should make a significant contribution to enhancing the quality of provision. The process operates at course, Institute and University level and results in the production of Course and Institute Enhancement Plans related both to the assurance and continuous improvement of quality. These annual evaluation reports (AERs) are produced and reviewed at course and Institute level, and are considered by the University's Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee.
- 35 **External Examining:** External examiners have an important role in assuring the standards and academic quality of courses. They are required to make an annual report to the University on the conduct of the course and matters related to standards and assessment. The report and the course response to it is part of the documentation for annual evaluation and periodic reviews.

- 36 **Student Feedback and Representation:** Students have a number of opportunities to provide feedback and evaluate the courses they are undertaking. Formal evaluation occurs at the end of each module and through the annual Course Experience Survey and the National Student Survey. Course Management Committees are held each semester with student representation and students are members of all key academic committees.
- 37 **Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) accreditation and approval:** A number of the University's courses are accredited or approved by PSRBs (such as Ofsted, British Psychological Society, Nursing and Midwifery Council, Health Care Professions Council) who themselves have mechanisms for the initial and continuing approval, monitoring and review of courses. Wherever possible the University seeks to integrate University and PSRB requirements for quality assurance, and consider reports through Institute and, where appropriate, University quality committees. A register of courses accredited or approved by PSRBs is maintained by AQU.
- 38 **Thematic Audits:** The University normally selects one or two University-wide processes or themes each year to audit and review with the intended outcome of maximising effectiveness in contributing to a high quality student experience. Existing practice is subject to scrutiny to assess effectiveness and identify good practice resulting in a report and recommendations for future development to ASQEC.

### Operational Documentation

- 39 Academic regulations, policies and procedures are set out in documentation lodged on the University's webpages (on this subject, maintained primarily by Registry Services and the Academic Quality Unit). Documentation constitutes the basis of the formulation, delivery and maintenance of the education provided by the University. It represents the terms by which, at any given point, participants in the University's academic provision are operating. Constituent parts of the regulatory framework, policies and procedures are regularly reviewed by relevant committees.
- 40 The **Academic Regulations** provide a framework for the operation of all courses and programmes of study offered by the University. They derive from three main sources: the regulations and processes governing the conduct of the general academic affairs of the University; the Taught Courses Regulatory Framework (TCRF) for undergraduate and postgraduate courses; and any regulations agreed at the point of approval for specific courses and programmes of study, as detailed in programme specifications.
- 41 The **AQU webpages** are designed to bring together procedures, policies and operational guidance relating to the assurance and enhancement of quality and standards across the whole University.
- 42 As an integral part of the course planning and approval process, Academic Board requires that all academic courses leading to an award must have a **programme specification (PS)** and a **course handbook**. This represents a full statement of the course as approved by the University. The programme specification is the primary reference point for the information on award and unit/module titles, admission and assessment regulations, and the curriculum. Students are issued course handbooks which include a hyperlink to the PS and details pertaining to the operation of their award. Relevant module specifications are made available via Blackboard, the University's Virtual Learning Environment.
- 43 Following approval, programme specifications are published by the Academic Quality Unit on the AQU webpages. Academic Board expects that courses will be kept under continual review and it is the responsibility of the course team to maintain and modify the PS and course handbook, through formal approval as appropriate.

- 44 The **Student Handbook** provides students with general information about the University and its policies and procedures as well as providing advice and guidance.
- 45 National documents such as the Subject Benchmark Statements, Qualifications Characteristics Statements, the Higher Education Qualifications Frameworks and the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#) are considered by relevant managers and committees as appropriate, and are regularly reviewed. University quality assurance and enhancement processes make explicit reference to these documents, and where appropriate the University integrates principles into its own processes.

### **Review and evaluation of quality assurance and enhancement processes**

- 46 These processes form part of an integrated whole, and are separable only in terms of emphasis and timing. For instance, the approval of a new programme of study carries with it the implication of continued monitoring/evaluation, modification and review. In turn, annual evaluation and responses to external examiner reports comprise an integral part of review.
- 47 The University does not regard these processes as static or immutable. It keeps them under review, and modifies their operation in the light of experience and changing educational circumstances. This function is the responsibility of the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee and is managed at an operational level by the Academic Quality Unit.

### **Publicly available information**

- 48 The University keeps under review the information it makes publicly available about the University and its courses, following the guidance published by HEFCE and the QAA, and the Competitions and Marketing Authority. Information about quality assurance and enhancement processes and policies, the learning and teaching strategy and on collaborative partnerships, as well as information about courses, including programme specifications, is available via the University webpages. Policies for student complaints, appeals and representations, and procedures for external examining are also available on the University webpages.

### **External Quality Assessment**

- 49 The University was subject to institutional review of its standards and quality by the Quality Assurance Agency. The most recent review was carried out in March 2011. This report is publicly available via the QAA (or University webpages) <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/provider?UKPRN=10007139#.WByVjk9vict>. The University is now subject to the new arrangements for quality assessment overseen by HEFCE. Information about these processes and associated information about the University can be found on the HEFCE Register of Providers webpages at <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/req/register/search/Provider/10007139>.

Version reference: 1.5

Document approved by: ASQEC April 2010

Date document comes into effect: immediate

Author of the document: Head of Quality Assurance and Enhancement

Date document is due for review: July 2020

### **Revision History**

<b>Committee</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Change</b>
n/a	August 2012	Document updated to include new section on Publicly Available Information

n/a	May 2016	Document updated to reflect changes in QAA information and guidance, UW sub-committees and quinquennial reviews.
n/a	November 2016	Updated to reflect changes to Academic Board and its sub-committees (applicable from September 2016) and renewed weblinks where necessary.
Academic Board	October 2017	<p>Updated to reflect the changed external context for quality management of HE provision, as well as internal developments, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. reference to the European Standards and Guidelines (2015)</li> <li>b. a section on key terminology</li> <li>c. further development of the principles to take account more explicitly of the relationship between quality assurance processes and quality enhancement</li> <li>d. include reference to the responsibilities of the Board of Governors</li> <li>e. clarification of the responsibilities of Academic Board</li> <li>f. inclusion of a section on external quality assessment.</li> </ul>