

# Summary of Institutional Policies and Procedures for the Assurance of Academic Quality and Standards



## Introduction

1. The University is responsible for the academic standards of awards made in its name, and for ensuring that the quality of learning experiences is appropriate to enable students to achieve those standards. In order to discharge those responsibilities, the University has a range of policies and procedures for assuring the academic standards of awards and enhancing the quality of its educational provision. These policies and procedures need to take into account key external points of reference, including the [UK Quality Code](#), the [Framework for Higher Education Qualifications \(FHEQ\)](#) and subject benchmarks.

## Policy framework

2. The University's [Quality and Standards Handbook](#) is a virtual handbook, which draws together all University policies, procedures and guidelines concerned with maintaining the standards, and assuring the quality, of academic programmes. The University also has a [Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes](#), which applies to all research degree programmes. Together with the [University's Regulations](#) for taught and research degree programmes, this documentation establishes the policy framework for managing the academic quality and standards of its educational provision.

## Programme approval

3. All proposed new programmes must be approved through a robust approval process, which includes the input of an External Adviser who is a subject specialist external to the University. Full details are set out in the University's [Policy on the Approval of New Programmes](#).
4. The three aims of the programme approval process are to:
  - a. Ensure that each proposed new programme contributes towards achievement of the strategic aims and objectives of the University, and the relevant faculty(ies) and academic unit(s) involved in the provision of the programme.
  - b. Ensure that an appropriate business case is in place for each proposed new programme, which demonstrates the viability of proposed new programme and that appropriate staffing and learning resources are in place for the effective delivery of the programme.
  - c. Ensure that each proposed new programme has been designed in such a way as to meet the University's expectations for academic quality and standards (as set out in the University's [Quality and Standards Handbook](#), [Regulations](#) and [Qualifications and Credit Framework](#)), and to meet or exceed the expectations of the [UK Quality Code](#) (including the [FHEQ](#) and, where relevant, [subject benchmark statements](#)) and where relevant the requirements of the appropriate Professional and Statutory Regulatory Body(ies) (PSRB).

The process has three stages (Strategic Approval, Business Case Approval and Academic Approval) that correspond to these three aims.

5. External advisers are appointed by the University in relation to all proposed new programmes. They play an important role in supporting the University to discharge its responsibility for ensuring that proposed new programmes meet the expectations of the UK Quality Code

(including the [FHEQ](#)), and that the academic quality and standards of proposed programmes are at least comparable to those in similar subjects in other UK universities. External advisers provide informed, independent and impartial judgments, and the University gives serious and active consideration to their comments and advice.

6. The full academic proposal is submitted to the relevant FTLSEC, which convenes a Programme Approval Committee. This Committee, which includes cross-University representation, undertakes a detailed academic scrutiny of the proposed programme against explicit criteria, and reaches a judgment as to whether the proposed programme meets these criteria. The authority to approve programmes rests with Senate, which has in turn delegated this authority to ULTSEC. The location of the authority to grant final approval of a proposed programme differs according to the complexity and risk associated with a programme.

### Changes to existing programmes

7. The University's [Policy on Changes to Programmes](#) sets out the policies and processes that apply when changes to existing programmes are proposed. As such changes vary in level of risk, the process for their approval is designed to be flexible and responsive, whilst remaining academically rigorous. Types of programme changes include:
  - a. Major changes, which can be broadly defined as being strategic in nature and involve fundamental changes to the programme aims, learning outcomes, assessment and/or structure.
  - b. Minor changes, which includes changes to module outlines and to programme regulations and specifications that are a normal part of the annual maintenance of provision.
  - c. Programme withdrawals and suspensions, and changes to programme titles or codes.

### Assessment

8. The [University Regulations](#), the [Policy for External Examiners of Taught Programmes](#), and the [Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes](#), together with related policy supporting documentation published in the [Quality and Standards Handbook](#), lay down the policy and procedural framework for the assessment of students, including the use and transfer of academic credit, student progression and awards.
9. Regulations and policies and procedures relating to assessment are reviewed in response to discipline needs or where significant trends are identified through routine review mechanisms, such as external examiners' reports.

### External examiners

10. External examiners, for both taught and research degrees, play an important role in ensuring that the standards of programmes are maintained. Fuller details are set out in the [Policy and Procedures for External Examiners of Taught Programmes](#), and the [Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes](#) and [Handbook for Examiners of Research Degrees by Thesis](#).
11. For both taught and research degrees external examiners are nominated by subject providers. Authority to appoint external examiners rests with Senate, although this responsibility is delegated to Faculties (FLTSECs in relation to taught programmes, Deans of Postgraduate Studies for research degrees). Nominations are considered against formal, documented criteria approved by ULTSEC. External examiners must possess appropriate and substantial levels of relevant teaching and research expertise and experience in relation to their duties.

12. All external examiners are required to submit written reports to the University on the academic quality and standards of the provision for which they are responsible (including alignment with the standards set out in the [FHEQ](#)), using standard report forms that ensure that key quality and standards issues are addressed. These reports are reviewed at subject level, with TPSC and PGRSC overseeing this process (for taught and research degrees respectively) on behalf of, and reporting to ULTSEC.

## **Annual monitoring**

13. Academic units undertake annual monitoring exercises for both taught and research degree provision: for taught degrees this takes place under the [Policies and Procedures for Annual Monitoring and Review](#) (AMR), and for research degrees through the [Quality Assurance and Enhancement Framework for Research Degree Programmes](#) (QAEF).
14. Both AMR and QAEF involve the reflection by the academic unit on a range of quantitative and qualitative data relating to the provision under review. This reflection forms the basis for the completion of an annual report that is then submitted to the Faculty with lead responsibility for that provision.
15. These subject reports are reviewed by the Faculty (under the auspices of FLTSEC for taught programmes, and Faculty GSCs for research degrees), with the Faculty reporting to TPSC on the operation of AMR and PGRSC in relation to QAEF. This allows TPSC and PGRSC to provide assurance to ULTSEC that the processes have operated effectively, and to identify any institutional or thematic issues that require action.

## **Periodic review**

16. Both taught and research degree provision is subject to a six-yearly periodic review, undertaken by a team of peers that includes both an external academic and a student member. For taught degrees this takes place through Learning and Teaching Review (LTR – full details of the process are set out in the [Policies and Procedures for Learning and Teaching Review](#)), and for research degrees it is carried out under the [QAEF](#).
17. Both processes are a supportive, development-led review of a subject area with the aim of enhancing the programme/s, while providing a robust mechanism for assuring and recording their quality, and for re-approving the provision. In both LTR and QAEF review teams consider a range of documentation relating to the provision to identify potential examples of good practice as well as areas for improvement. These are then discussed with the subject through a review visit to the provider. This visit includes meetings with academic and support staff, students and, where appropriate, other stakeholders.
18. Following the visit, the team makes a written report setting out its views and judgments on the provision reviewed. This includes items of exemplary practice and any recommendations for enhancement. For LTR it also includes a recommendation on whether the programmes should be re-approved. The written report is considered by the subject provider who produces a response and an action plan to implement any recommendations.
19. Faculties monitor the subject's provider and action plan (FLTSECs do this for LTR, Faculty GSCs for QAEF), and provide assurance to TPSC and PGRSC that review recommendations have been addressed. TPSC and PGRSC also ensure that any recommendations for University action following LTR and QAEF respectively are considered and addressed. Both committees report on this to ULTSEC, which has overall responsibility for periodic reviews.

## Educational partnerships

20. The University has a growing portfolio of educational partnerships, a record of which is maintained and published in the [Register of Educational Partnerships](#). All such partnerships must align with the University's [Educational Partnerships Strategy](#), and the development, operation, monitoring and review must be consistent with the University's [Educational Partnerships Policy](#).
21. The University has a variety of partnership arrangements, including articulation, dual and joint award, validation, and hybrids thereof. These different types of arrangements have different implications for the respective responsibilities of the University and the partner institution in relation to quality management and support for the student experience and lifecycle. Guidance on the implications of different partnerships is published on the University's [Educational Partnerships webpages](#).

## Work-based and placement learning

22. A number of the University's degree programmes incorporate placements or work-based learning. The [Work-based and Placement Learning Policy](#) sets out the University's requirements and expectations in relation to year- and semester-long placements; module- and short-term placements; and postgraduate research placements. Guidance on placement development/design, approval, support (including health and safety), monitoring and review is published on the University's [Placement webpages](#).

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