Academic Quality and Standards Handbook: Overview

1 Introduction

The Academic Quality and Standards Handbook (Handbook) is an online primary source of information for staff and students about the University’s strategic approach to quality and standards management for both its taught and research awards at the University and partner institutions. For taught awards this is achieved through the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Framework.

The Handbook also provides links to the policies and regulations that are used to secure academic standards and the quality student learning opportunities, and ensure the implementation of a consistent approach to quality and standards. Forms and templates that are used for the quality assurance mechanisms can also be accessed from this Handbook page.

Finally, links to the individual Quality and Standards teams can be accessed from the Handbook page which provides further information on quality assurance processes.

The Handbook has 14 Chapters. An overview of each is provided below.

2 Academic governance (Handbook chapter 2)

Responsibility for the quality and standards of the University’s awards rests with the Academic Board whose role is defined in the Articles of Government (Statutory and General Regulations). The University manages its academic activities, academic standards, assurance and enhancement of the student experience through a typical academic governance structure.

Academic Board’s responsibilities are primarily implemented through its senior reporting committees (UPPC, UREC, UQSC, UESEC). In addition to the central committee structure, Schools, as the primary academic units of the University have responsibility for the quality assurance of their provision operating in accordance with quality assurance processes. Assurance work is carried out in the context of professional and subject expertise in relation to teaching and learning and research and is achieved through School Quality and Standards Committee (SQSC), annual monitoring, responding to student feedback and wider subject development and engagement with external pedagogical and subject-specific networks.

The Student Contract covers the main terms and conditions of the contractual relationship between the student and the University, including the applicant stage. It highlights items that might be of particular interest, including the University’s tuition fee policy, course changes and complaint handling.
3 Quality Assurance and Enhancement Framework (for taught provision)

In order to realise its responsibility for academic standards of taught awards, Academic Board has in place a Quality Assurance and Enhancement (QAE) Framework which aims to secure academic standards and improve the quality of the student experience through a series of quality assurance and academic governance mechanisms that align with sector practice and the QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education. The main elements of the QAE Framework are listed below and shown diagrammatically in annex 1. Annex 2 provides an overview of the way in which these are used to support the management of the academic standards of the University’s curriculum and assessment and ultimately its awards.

The QAE Framework is delivered through a number of academic postholders with particular authorities at University level (e.g. PVC (Education and Students), chairs of PARPs, university committees and exam boards) and in Schools (from module leader, course leader through to Deputy Head QAE and HoS), and is managed by a professional service division – Quality and Standards based in Academic Services.

- **Academic Frameworks (Handbook chapter 3)**

These frameworks, including the Common Academic Framework, protect and enhance the University’s academic standards through the use of shared frameworks for the design and structure of awards. The frameworks promotes equity, transparency, choice and opportunity through principles relating to qualifications, regulations, credit, modularity and award titles. They link to relevant national benchmarks and to European frameworks.

- **Academic Regulations (Handbook chapter 4)**

The University’s academic regulations e.g. the General Examination and Assessment Regulations (GEAR) for taught courses, prescribe the regulations governing assessments, resits, progression and awards. They also include the regulations for mitigating circumstances, academic appeals and the appointment of external examiners. Exceptions to the regulations, which are subject to Academic Board approval, are course-specific and occur only where it is required by a Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB), or in the case of joint awards with other institutions.

- **Assessment (Handbook chapter 5)**

The University’s Assessment Policy provides a framework for summative assessment that is complementary to its examination and assessment regulations and provides an internal reference point for the development of locally-based assessment policies appropriate to the subject and discipline that support and safeguard standards, enhance learning and teaching, and are valid, fair and reliable. The Assessment Policy is supported by the University’s grading scales, grading descriptors and moderation guidelines.

- **External Examiners (Handbook chapter 6)**

The use of external examiners is a key means by which the University ensures its awards are comparable with national standards. External examiners are assigned to all modules and courses, and are involved in the setting and moderation of assessed work, attending examination boards, submitting an annual report which confirms academic standards. The University holds an annual external examiner’s workshop. The Academic Health process provides a key mechanism for ensuring external examiner comments are considered and acted upon. The roles and responsibilities of external examiners are laid out in External Examiners’ Handbook.
- **Curriculum (Handbook chapter 7)**

All new courses developed in the university are subject to a full validation process that requires internal discipline peer scrutiny, use of subject benchmark and external subject specialists are involved in their approval. The majority of course validation is undertaken by University Validation Panels acting on behalf of UQSC. Courses are validated for 5 years.

The University ensures that it meets its statutory requirements for accurate curriculum information to all stakeholders in the context of consumer law (CMA). This includes expectations about information provision to applicants and students regarding changes to courses and regulations.

- **Periodic Review (Handbook chapter 8)**

The University has a periodic review process in which all undergraduate and postgraduate taught provision is reviewed every 5 years. Periodic review requires peer scrutiny, and the participation of students and external subject experts on panels. The process makes provision for periodic review to take place in conjunction with external review by PSRBs.

- **Academic Health (Handbook chapter 9)**

The basic building block of the University's quality assurance system is the annual monitoring process known as Academic Health which ensures all courses and their constituent modules are reviewed annually, requiring all courses to review a dashboard of student success and experience outcomes. Academic Health Reports are produced from module through to course, and are synthesised into School Reports which consider the range of courses within their portfolio. School Reports are considered at School and University level. External examiner reports and student feedback are vital parts of this process.

- **Student Voice (Handbook chapter 10)**

The University aims to enhance the student learning experience by ensuring that the views and experiences of all students inform the development and improvement of academic provision and support services.

The University’s Student Engagement in Quality Policy sets out the ways and guiding principles by which views and contributions of students are sought to bring about engagement of students in shaping their learning environment. This is achieved by collecting student feedback through a variety of means, including at module and course level, across the full range of the institution’s activity, and through student representation and student engagement with quality assurance and enhancement e.g. student reviewers on panels. It is a requirement that the outcomes of student evaluation are addressed in the formal processes of annual monitoring and evaluation and periodic review.

The University’s Student Charter has been co-created by students and staff to realise the potential of the University’s learning community. It sets out what students and staff should all anticipate from the partnership in terms of expectations and commitments for students, the university, and the Students’ Union.

- **Collaboration (Handbook chapter 11)**

The University is involved in a number of partnerships with educational institutions involving the delivery of courses leading to a University of Brighton award. Responsibility for the quality and standards of awards remains that of the university's Academic Board and where
a joint degree is awarded this responsibility is shared equally and jointly with the other awarding body.

The QAE Framework applies to all the University’s provision and is adjusted according to the nature of the partnership. All new partnership proposals are subject to processes relating to the approval of new partners and approval of new programmes as required. All partner institutions involved in delivery of Brighton-validated programmes are subject to a review process held at least every five years.

The University of Brighton’s model of partnership emphasises linkage at both subject and institution level and there are a different models in place according to the nature of the partnership. For FECs the quality assurance is managed institutionally and for Specialist and Overseas provision the quality assurance is managed by the School. Brighton and Sussex Medical School (BSMS) is a joint entity of both the University of Brighton and University of Sussex offering academic awards. The two universities discharge their academic responsibilities through the Joint Academic Review Board (JARB) and through representation on the BSMS Academic Board.

4 Postgraduate research (Handbook chapter 12)

The regulations for postgraduate research students are set out in the Code of Practice and Regulations for Research Degrees, managed by the Doctoral College. The Doctoral College Board is responsible for the development, monitoring and reviewing the University’s quality assurance and enhancement processes for research degrees. It reports to the University Quality and Standards Committee in relation to PGR annual monitoring and regulations.

5 External Reference Points (Handbook chapter 13)

The University’s engagement with external reference points is a significant influence on its approach to quality assurance and enhancement. Engagement with the wider national and international academic and university community, whether through external involvement in our own processes or our involvement with external processes, is fundamental to achieving a collective ownership of academic standards, to inform and facilitate academic debate and decision making and improvements to the student learning experience.

Notably, such reference points include the QAA UK Quality Code of Higher Education (and frameworks within the European Higher Education Area), PSRBs with which the University is involved, formal networks or organisations established across the sector (such as the HE Academy), the National Student Survey, as well as informal networks.

6 Quality Enhancement (Handbook chapter 14)

The University views the relationship between quality assurance and enhancement as mutually reinforcing, and as such good practice arising from quality assurance processes drive learning and teaching enhancement.

The University considers enhancement of student learning integral to its organisational strategies, policies and processes, and a core feature of its approach to the management of quality and standards. The University’s Strategy articulates an overall framework of institutional priorities which place the student at the centre of its activity, including Key Performance Indicators which provide a sharp clarity and explicit link to improving learning for students. The Education and Student Experience Strategic Plan sets out key institutional strategic interventions, with the Education and Student Experience Implementation plan monitored through UESEC.
The coordination and strategic oversight of University led initiatives is achieved through the University Management Board and in particular the Deputy Vice Chancellor who has responsibility for portfolio development, the Pro Vice Chancellor (Education and Students) Experience who has responsibility for academic quality. The Registrar & Secretary has wider responsibility for the operational delivery of services to students.

The University, through the Centre for Learning and Teaching (CLT) provides mechanisms for sharing good practice in learning, teaching and assessment, and opportunities for subject-based enhancement activity to emerge. This enhancement work operates alongside and is complementary to the enhancement components of the core quality assurance mechanisms.

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Quality Assurance and Enhancement Framework

Aims:
- Securing and assuring standards
- Improving student academic experience

Key:
- Student involvement
- Externality
- Use of Data

National quality assurance reference points:
- UK Quality Code for Higher Education
- Framework for Higher Education Qualifications
- Office for Students baseline conditions for quality
- Student Protection Plan
Academic Standards reference points against which curriculum is reviewed (external/internal)

- University Common Academic Framework protects academic standards through the use of a shared and common framework for the design and structure of the University’s awards
- University Curriculum Design Framework further defines common design features and assessment equivalences
- QAA Quality Code
- QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications – describes the general achievement expected of holders’ qualification type
- QAA Credit framework for England defines expected credit for each qualification
- QAA Subject benchmarks describe expected academic standards
- SEEC Descriptors describe expected standards by level
- PSRB requirements (Inc. Apprenticeships)
- Validation and periodic review processes involving internal and external review of curriculum and assessment design

Management of Academic Standards throughout assessment cycle

- University Assessment policy provides a framework for summative assessment and an internal reference point for the development of locally-based assessment policies that support and safeguard standards, enhance learning and teaching and are valid, fair and reliable.
- University Moderation policy
  - requires internal review of assessment tasks and external review of examinations
  - requires internal and external moderation of marking
- University UG/PG marking scale
- University UG/PG Grading Descriptors describes characteristics that assessed work needs to demonstrate achieve a particular grade
- University General Examination and Assessment Regulations (GEAR)
- External Examiners reporting (also note UoB staff as externals)

Aims and Learning outcomes

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