



BUCKINGHAMSHIRE
NEW UNIVERSITY

EST. 1891



STATEMENT ON QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICIES AND PROCESSES

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Background

- 1 UK higher education institutions (HEIs) are autonomous and have primary responsibility for the quality of their provision and its assurance. In accordance with [The UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#), published by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), degree-awarding bodies are required to have transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations to govern how they award academic credit and qualifications.
- 2 Buckinghamshire New University recognises that it is responsible for the academic standards of awards made in its name and for ensuring that the quality of learning opportunities it provides is appropriate to enable students to achieve those standards.
- 3 The University also recognises that responsibility for the academic standards of all credit and qualifications made in its name is never delegated and consequently that it remains responsible for those academic standards regardless of where the learning opportunities are offered or who provides them.

Purpose Statement

- 4 This statement provides an overall reference point for the University's quality framework. It sets out the University's approach to quality assurance, including its key principles and links to individual policies and procedures which establish more detail.
- 5 The statement is published in alignment with the aims of the [Wider Information Set \(WIS\)](#) which seeks to make it easier for students and the wider public to access information published by higher education institutions about their programmes and particularly how quality and standards on those programmes are assessed and maintained.
- 6 This is an evolving document, reviewed annually by the University's Quality and Standards Committee (QSC) to ensure a continual process of reflection and enhancement.

Applicability and Scope

- 7 This statement supplements and supports the University's documentary framework, which set out the University's expectations and requirements for practice by its staff and students particularly in relation to quality assurance and quality enhancement.

Responsibilities

- 8 This statement has been developed for the University and approved by Quality & Standards Committee (QSC); the Academic Registry is responsible for maintaining and updating it on QSC's behalf.

Quality assurance principles

- 9 Quality assurance at the University operates in accordance with the following key principles:
- The use of **agreed reference points** to guide the development of policies and processes, including the expectations in the *UK Quality Code* and those published by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs)
 - A **risk-based** process to ensure a proportionate response, while maintaining rigorous, robust review mechanisms
 - **Student, employer and other stakeholder engagement** through consultation, representation and feedback mechanisms
 - **Evidence-based** consideration with decisions underpinned by analysis of data
 - **Timely decision-making** taken as close to the source as possible, ensuring a rapid turnaround for the benefit of the University community
 - **External peer review** to ensure decisions are consistent with sector best practice
 - **Sharing of best practice** to inform effective decision-making
 - A commitment to **continual improvement** of processes to deliver an effective learning environment for students who are at the heart of the system.

Student engagement in quality assurance processes

- 10 Student engagement is wide-ranging across the University and Bucks works closely with its students' union (SU) to engage students with a wide variety of activities. In relation to quality assurance processes the University seeks to involve students:
- **Pro-actively** in the development of its programmes, policies and procedures through consultation
 - **Concurrently** through participation and representation on key decision-making bodies, including:
 - Senate, Academic Planning, Quality & Standards, and Education Committees
 - non-standing committees such as approval and review panels, and panels relating to student conduct
 - **Reactively** through a variety of survey and feedback mechanisms where student opinions can be recorded and used to contribute to a cycle of continuous improvement.
- 11 Feedback might be via a formal programme committee through the student representation scheme co-ordinated by the SU, or through module and programme feedback questionnaires.
- 12 Surveys will include the external National Student Survey (NSS), UK Engagement Survey (UKES) and DLHE surveys and, for postgraduate students, the postgraduate taught / research experience surveys (PTES / PRES). Students will also be invited to participate in a variety of internal surveys.

Quality assurance framework

University regulations

- 13 Bucks offers programmes at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. Programmes include courses at levels 4, 5, 6 and 7 of [The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies \(FHEQ\)](#).
- 14 The University also supports a research degree programme at level 8. This is validated by an external body.
- 15 All courses for which the University is responsible are normally subject to the *Academic Assessment Regulations* which set out the regulations for all taught academic programmes delivered in the UK or overseas by whatever mode or regime. Exceptions to these regulations are specified in individual programme specifications, e.g. some courses have specific professional body requirements.
- 16 The University publishes online the following procedures which relate to its assessment regulations:
 - *Academic Appeals Process*
 - *Academic Misconduct*
 - *Fitness to Practise Procedure*
 - *Fitness to Study Procedure*
 - *Boards of Examiners*
 - *Mitigating Circumstances*
 - *Student Complaints Procedure*
 - *Assessment of Students*
 - *e-Submission, Marking, Feedback and Moderation Policy*
 - *Examination Handbook*
 - *Interruption, Withdrawal or Transfer of Studies Procedure*
- 17 The University also publishes Codes of Practice for its research degrees.
 - *The Code of Practice – Postgraduate Research Degrees (Staffordshire University)* applies to research students who registered with Brunel University and first enrolled with the University from 1 April 2016.
 - *The Code of Practice – Postgraduate Research Degrees (Coventry University)* applies to all research students who enrolled with the University after 1 January 2009 and up to 31 December 2014.
- 18 In addition, the University also offers Professional Doctorates and Research Degrees by Portfolio which are validated by Coventry University until 31 December 2014.

The University's committee structure and relation to quality issues

Committee structure: Deliberative

- 19 Governance of the overall quality and standards of the University reside with Senate. As established in the University's *Articles of Government*, Senate is responsible to Council – the University's governing body – for general issues relating to the research, scholarship, teaching and courses at Bucks. Senate is also responsible for taking any

action it considers necessary to safeguard the standards of the awards of the University and the quality of its provision.

- 20 The Quality & Standards Committee (QSC), a standing committee of Senate, is responsible for overseeing quality and standards of the University's taught degree programmes. QSC is also responsible for developing and enhancing policies and procedures in the areas of academic quality and enhancement and for advising Senate on all aspects of such policies and procedures both within the University and between the University and its partners.
- 21 Senate and QSC are supported by a Faculty Board in each of the University's Faculties which is chaired by the respective Dean. Faculty Boards are responsible for day to day management of Faculty academic programmes and courses and for developing and monitoring the implementation of the University's and Faculty's strategic priorities in the areas of quality and enhancement.
- 22 Research Degrees Committee (RDC) is a sub-committee of the University's Research & Enterprise Committee which in turn reports to Senate. RDC is responsible for ensuring that the regulations of the University and its validating partners are complied with in respect to research degrees. RDC is also responsible for developing policy on academic matters relating to research students and research degrees in accordance with the University's validating partner and sector requirements.
- 23 Full details of the University's deliberative committee structure are published online.

Committee structure: Executive

- 24 The University's deliberative committee structure is supported by the executive under the direction of the Vice-Chancellor and the Senior Management Team (SMT); this includes the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, the Pro-Vice-Chancellors responsible for Education and Research and Enterprise, and the Director of Finance.
- 25 The Academic Registry falls within the remit of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education. Under the lead of the Academic Registrar, its role is to support the University's quality and enhancement activities across the range of its programmes. The structure of the Academic Registry is currently under review but includes responsibility for the following activities: Governance, Approval and review; Partnership and student exchange programmes; Academic assessment and conduct; and general School registry activities. All teams are responsible for developing and enhancing policies and procedures in relation to their areas of activity. This includes mapping of processes to the UK Quality Code.
- 26 In addition, the Research & Enterprise Development (RED) Unit is responsible for supporting research activities across the University, including research students, and for advising the University and Faculties on the development of their research strategies.
- 27 Each Faculty appoints a Faculty Quality Co-ordinator responsible for the Faculty's academic standards and quality of the educational experience delivered. They will work directly with the Heads of School and Heads of Academic Department and support teams with quality processes. Co-ordinators will also act as a point of contact with the Academic Registry and other central service directorates in relation to quality matters.

- 28 The University's executive committee structure is currently under review. Detailed terms of reference and structure diagrams will be published in due course.

Approval of programmes

- 29 Each new programme must go through a robust approval process; this is designed to assure the University that programmes are of an appropriate quality and standard to lead to their award being approved. The precise process will depend on the level of risk involved:
- Programmes leading to an award defined in the FHEQ will be subject to the full *Approval of Academic Provision* process.
 - Courses delivered by partners will also follow the Approval of Academic Provision process, but with some modifications to ensure that partner issues are considered at initial approval and curriculum development.
 - Short courses, including both those which award credit and those which do not, will be subject to the *Short Course Approval Process*. Short courses need not comply with the standard delivery pattern of the University and can be offered at weekends, through intensive workshops, or via evening programmes. Short courses will typically be approved for shorter periods.
- 30 Senate is responsible for approving all validated programmes and their award titles, following the recommendation of the authorised approval panel.
- 31 Changes to validated programmes are accommodated via the University's *Course Amendment Procedure* process.

Monitoring and review of programmes

External examiners

- 32 External examiners play a key role in the review of programmes. Their primary responsibility is to act as an independent and impartial adviser to the University. In doing so they are expected to provide informative comment and recommendations upon whether or not:
- The threshold academic standards set for the University's awards in accordance with the FHEQ and applicable subject benchmarks are being maintained
 - The assessment process measures student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme(s) and is conducted in line with the University's policies and regulations
 - The academic standards and the achievements of students are comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which the external examiner has experience.
- 33 At least one external examiner must be appointed to each programme or subject area that leads to an award of the University or of a Professional Body. Senate retains responsibility for the appointment of all external examiners across the University and its partners.

- 34 Completion of an annual report provides an independent and objective appraisal of the standard and quality of the University's provision. Reports are risk rated by the University in to Red, Amber and Green (RAG) categories depending on the nature of external comments. Reports are reviewed and responded to by course teams and the process is monitored by QSC.
- 35 The processes for managing the University's external examiner processes, including detail of institutional responsibilities, are fully outlined in the *External examiners handbook*.

Programme review and enhancement (PRE)

- 36 PRE is an annual process within the University designed to review performance and feedback on University programmes. In particular, it allows the University to:
- Consider evidence to confirm the academic standards of its awards
 - Gather evidence to consider the quality of students' learning opportunities and experience
 - Evaluate its effectiveness
 - Identify good practice
 - Strengthen accountability
 - Take informed action to enhance its programmes
- 37 PRE is a continual cycle of review and enhancement, culminating in an annual review and enhancement report. It supports other review mechanisms operating across the University.
- 38 PRE includes both module reporting, where review is by exception according to set criteria, and programme reporting, where teams will prepare a report and action plan using the template provided. Teams are encouraged to review a variety of evidence including external examiner reports, student progression and award data, student feedback and survey outcomes (including the NSS and DLHE), programme committee records, professional body reports, and any internal or external review reports.
- 39 The PRE process is fully outlined in the *Programme Review and Enhancement Policy*. The process is overseen by QSC.

Review of research degrees

- 40 The University's research degree programme has its own review processes, arising from the annual review of student progress outlined in the *Regulations for research degrees*.
- 41 Comments are collated from student reviews and inform a Faculty research report. This in turn informs an Institutional report considered by RDC as part of the SURE process (see below).

Periodic department review

- 42 The periodic department review process provides a focus on academic standards, the scholarship of academic staff, and their engagement with the pedagogy of their discipline.

- 43 Specifically, the aims of periodic department review are to:
- Enable an 'exchange of ideas' with external academic and professional peers in relation to teaching in the department and to support staff in their aims to develop their programmes
 - Contribute to programme review and enhancement
 - Consider the range and nature of scholarly activities of staff and to evidence how staff draw upon these to maintain currency within the curriculum
 - Evidence staff awareness of subject and sector pedagogic developments and to provide examples of how such engagements have been introduced into the curriculum
 - Consider how feedback from former students, employers, professional bodies, subject associations and professional practice has been used in the development of the subject
 - Identify examples of good practice for wider dissemination.
- 44 Reviews operate at departmental level within the University and run to a six-yearly cycle. A panel will be convened of both internal and external members as well as a student representative. The department under review will prepare and submit a self-evaluation document which will be forwarded to the panel with other supplementary information in advance. The panel will then meet with staff and students from the department over the course of a day. A summary report of findings is prepared by the panel which the department is required to respond to and generate an action plan; this is subsequently presented to QSC.
- 45 The review process is detailed in the *Review Process for University Departments and Academic Partnerships Policy* document.

Partnerships and collaborative provision

- 46 The University defines an academic partnership as any relationship where students' learning opportunities are in some way dependent on another party. This applies to any form of credit bearing provision whether resulting in the award of credit only or in a formal award of the University. It covers all relationships whether or not a partner is involved in the actual academic delivery.
- 47 The University recognises several types of partnership provision, including accreditation, articulation, co-delivery, franchise and validation. A partner register is maintained with complete details of existing partnerships, their location, course or programme of study, and the nature of the relationship with Bucks.

Assurance and maintenance of academic standards

Annual reports on quality assurance processes

- 48 Each year, the University prepares a number of reports on its quality assurance mechanisms. These are reviewed by QSC as part of the SURE process (see below).

- 49 Annual quality reports prepared by the Academic Registry include:
- Academic Appeals
 - Academic Misconduct
 - Academic Partnerships & Erasmus
 - Boards of Examiners
 - Examinations
 - External Examiners
 - Fitness to Practise
 - Mitigating Circumstances
 - Validation
- 50 Reports are prepared by the relevant team in the Academic Registry and follow a standard format. This provides: the context against which the report has been prepared; a review of the previous year's action plan; analysis and critical reflection of the process; the identification of achievements and good practice; and the preparation of an action plan for the year ahead.

Strategic University Review and Evaluation (SURE)

- 51 The *Strategic University Review and Evaluation (SURE)* process is an annual opportunity for critical reflection and strategic planning.
- 52 The process aims to:
- Secure continued systematic improvement in the overall quality of provision and the student experience
 - Develop action plans which can be effectively implemented and monitored throughout the academic year
 - Review and contextualise differences for the purposes of maintaining equality and diversity
 - Provide an opportunity for Faculties, Directorates and Partners to reflect on their operation and achievements during the previous academic year.
- 53 SURE is overseen by QSC for undergraduate and postgraduate taught provision and by RDC for research degrees. It comprises a number of reports as follows:
- Faculty achievement reports
 - Directorate achievement reports from the Academic Registry, Learning and Teaching and Student Services
 - Academic partner reports
 - Research annual review & evaluation report
- 54 Finalised reports and action plans are considered annually by a joint meeting of the University Council and Senate and inform its judgement on the maintenance of academic standards for that academic year.