

# Chapter 1

## The Quality Strategy: Management of Quality and Standards

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## SCOPE

The Quality Management Handbook (or QMH) describes the University's strategic approach to the management of quality and standards including the operational procedures used to:

- Set and maintain the standards of its taught qualifications and awards; and,
- To enhance the quality of the student experience.

The QMH is owned and managed by the [Governance, Quality Assurance and Student Casework unit](#) (GQASC), with principal oversight by Academic Board's Academic Quality Enhancement Committee (AQEC)<sup>1</sup>.

## PURPOSE

This handbook is the product of years of debate and experimentation within the University. The processes and procedures described in chapters 2 - 9 are continuously evaluated against current regulatory conditions and sector best practice. Alongside other Institutional policies and procedures, it enables the Institution to remain compliant with the Office for Students' (OfS) Ongoing Conditions of Registration contained within the [Regulatory Framework for Higher Education \(HE\) in England](#), specifically the B conditions for quality, reliable standards and positive outcomes for all students (see Figure 1).

On a practical level it assists staff in developing a detailed and contemporary understanding of the Institution's approach to setting standards and managing quality and the specific operational processes with which they are required to engage.

## EXTERNAL REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT

### The Office for Students

The OfS is the independent regulator of HE in England. OfS's primary aim is '*to ensure that every student, whatever their background, has a fulfilling experience of higher education that enriches their lives and careers*' ([OfS Strategy 2022 to 2025](#)).

All publicly funded HE providers in England are required, in accordance with section 4(5) of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 (HERA), to register with the OfS by demonstrating their compliance with a set of [Conditions of Registration](#). Edge Hill University was entered into the Register of HE Providers in England in 2018.

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<sup>1</sup> **Note:** Principal responsibility for the quality assurance of postgraduate research degrees including PhD, Professional Doctorate and Masters by Research programmes resides with the Graduate School, with principal oversight by the Academic Board's Research and Innovation Committee - see Chapters 8 & 9.

The OfS's approach to regulation is based on a set of minimum expectations, referred to as the 'regulatory baseline'. The regulatory baseline is a set of expectations that represent the minimum performance to which students and taxpayers are entitled. Regulatory expectations are primarily expressed through a set of Ongoing Conditions of Registration, contained within their [Regulatory Framework](#). These are the primary tool by which providers' performance is continually monitored and assessed.

The Regulator's approach to monitoring and intervention is **risk-based and proportionate**, meaning their focus is on providers considered to be 'at risk' of falling below the regulatory baseline in terms of performance. Those not perceived to be at risk i.e., those who continue to meet the conditions of registration '*will find a supportive regulator that ensures success and innovation happens with little interference*' (OfS Annual Report and Accounts 2019-20, June 2020<sup>2</sup>).

The conditions relating to Quality and Standards (the 'B conditions') are listed in Figure 1. The OfS's overall approach to regulating quality and standards is '**principles-based**', rather than prescriptive. This means that providers have the autonomy to establish their own internal quality assurance processes, pursue excellence as they see fit and deliver value for money (VfM) for their students.

### Value for Money

The OfS expects all HE providers to deliver value for money for students and for taxpayers (see [OfS Strategy 2022 to 2025](#)). It is up to individual providers to determine how they will deliver value for money for their students, however the key areas most pertinent to academic quality are:

- improving teaching quality;
- protecting students as consumers; and
- securing positive employment outcomes.

The processes and activities described within this Handbook are aligned to the key areas above and therefore support the University in delivering value for money for our students. Details of the specific processes, activities and sources of evidence can be found on the key documents page of GQASC's Wiki page under '[Value for Money](#)'.<sup>3</sup>

good practice framework for programme review processes in England. The framework aims to build on the work already undertaken by universities in reviewing courses and bringing more consistency. It aims to strengthen how universities ensure that all courses provide good value and outcomes for students, while meeting the changing needs of employers and the economy.

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<sup>2</sup> [Office for Students Annual Report and Accounts 2019-20](#), published June 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Additionally, and in line with UUK's [Framework for programme reviews: ensuring the value of courses](#), the University will be publishing a statement, on its website, on how it conducts programme review.

Figure 1: The ongoing conditions for Quality (B1 – B4 &amp; B6) and Standards (B5)

<b>B1</b>	The provider must ensure that the students registered on each higher education course receive a high-quality academic experience. A high-quality academic experience includes but is not limited to ensuring that each higher education course: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. is up-to-date;</li> <li>2. provides educational challenge;</li> <li>3. is coherent;</li> <li>4. is effectively delivered; and</li> <li>5. requires students to develop relevant skills.</li> </ol>
<b>B2</b>	The provider must take all reasonable steps to ensure: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. students registered on a higher education course receive resources and support to ensure: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. a high quality academic experience for those students; and</li> <li>b. those students succeeding in and beyond higher education; and</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. effective engagement with students to ensure: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. a high quality academic experience for those students; and</li> <li>b. those students succeed in and beyond higher education.</li> </ol> </li> </ol>
<b>B3</b>	The provider must deliver successful outcomes for all of its students, which are recognised and valued by employers, and/or enable further study.
<b>B4</b>	The provider must ensure that: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. students are assessed effectively;</li> <li>2. each assessment is valid and reliable;</li> <li>3. academic regulations are designed to ensure that relevant awards are credible;</li> <li>4. academic regulations are designed to ensure effective assessment of technical proficiency in the English language in a manner that appropriately reflects the level and content of the course; and</li> <li>5. relevant awards granted to students are credible at the point of being granted and when compared to those granted previously.</li> </ol>
<b>B5</b>	The provider must ensure that, in respect of any relevant awards granted to students who complete a higher education course provided by, or on behalf of, the provider (whether or not the provider is the awarding body): <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. any standards set appropriately reflect any applicable sector-recognised standards; and</li> <li>2. awards are only granted to students whose knowledge and skills appropriately reflect any applicable sector-recognised standards.</li> </ol>

## Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework

The [Teaching Excellence Framework](#) (TEF) is a scheme run by the Office for Students (OfS) that aims to encourage HE providers to improve and deliver excellence in the areas that students care about the most: teaching, learning and achieving positive outcomes from their studies. As part of the TEF exercise, the OfS assesses and rates providers' excellence above the minimum baseline expectations for quality and standards. Providers receive an overall rating as well as two underpinning ratings – one for the student experience and one for student outcomes.

The ratings reflect the extent to which a provider delivers an excellent experience and outcomes for its mix of undergraduate students and across the range of its undergraduate courses and subjects. There are three ratings categories – Bronze, Silver and Gold. Where there is an absence of excellence beyond baseline expectations, a TEF rating is not awarded. Assessment takes place every 4 years.

### **Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted)**

Ofsted regulates and inspects Higher Education Institutions that provide education and training services in England. While ultimate responsibility for the quality assurance of Initial Teacher Education programmes resides with AQEC, operational arrangements for external Ofsted inspection are managed by the Faculty of Education, with oversight by the Education Faculty Board.

Additionally, Ofsted, in conjunction with other bodies<sup>4</sup>, is responsible for the oversight of apprenticeship provision. They inspect the quality of apprenticeship training that is delivered by training providers to ensure it is high-quality and meets the needs of employers and apprentices; this includes higher apprenticeships (level 5) and degree apprenticeships (level 6) which are also regulated by the Office for Students. Ofsted is responsible for inspecting the quality of apprenticeship training provision and publishing the outcomes of these inspections. Where an apprenticeship training provider is registered with the OfS they will also share relevant information with Ofsted to inform its inspection activity and its regulation of providers on its Register.

In addition to full inspection activity (due within 24 months of a monitoring visit), Ofsted carries out monitoring visits to all new apprenticeship providers. The University's Ofsted Working Group for Apprenticeships (which reports to the Institutional Apprenticeship Group) oversees preparations and operational support for inspection visits. The University's full inspection of apprenticeship provision is now anticipated to take place during 2023/24.

### **Professional Statutory and Regulatory Bodies**

The Institution has a strong track record in developing degree programmes that integrate academic study with professional competencies resulting in registered practitioner status in teaching<sup>5</sup> and health professions<sup>6</sup>. Accreditation by Professional Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) is also available on several other degree programmes, for example Law (recognised by the Solicitors Regulation Authority and Bar Standards Board) and Psychology

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<sup>4</sup> See the Apprenticeship Accountability Statement for details of the various bodies involved in apprenticeship system oversight in England: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeship-accountability-statement>

<sup>5</sup> Regulated by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) [www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted).

<sup>6</sup> Including regulation by the General Medical Council [www.gmc-uk.org/](http://www.gmc-uk.org/), Health and Care Professions Council [www.hcpc-uk.co.uk/](http://www.hcpc-uk.co.uk/), Nursing and Midwifery Council [www.nmc.org.uk/](http://www.nmc.org.uk/) and Social Work England [www.socialworkengland.org.uk/](http://www.socialworkengland.org.uk/).

(accredited by the British Psychological Society). Accreditation may extend professional body membership to our graduates or, as in Accountancy, provide exemptions from some professional examinations. Processes for the approval, monitoring and review of PSRB-regulated provision are described in Chapters 3 and 4 of this Handbook, and a [Professional Accreditations Register](#) is published on the University's website.

## QUALITY MANAGEMENT AT EDGE HILL

### Our Quality 'Culture'

The OfS's principles-based approach to regulation requires providers to demonstrate a level of maturity. Our 'quality culture' is based on the concept of **shared responsibility** in which all parts of the organisation are accountable to each other through the Institution's [executive management and governance structures](#). This handbook therefore describes the roles and expectations of individuals, groups, panels and committees (which may include students and external stakeholders) in assuring standards, identifying and managing risk and enhancing quality.

Threats to standards and quality may be generated by internal or external conditions and are either exacerbated or mitigated by how the Institution responds to them. Managers at all levels are expected to promote a 'no blame' culture in which staff:

- Have the confidence to identify and highlight potential threats to quality and standards; and,
- Are empowered to formulate and take mitigating action when needed.

### Assessing and Managing Academic Risk

Whether or not academic provision is deemed to be at risk depends on the interaction between the threats identified and our ability to manage them. A department operating in a high-risk environment may be regarded as medium or low *net risk* based on its ability to effective control measures put in place. Where net risk is deemed to be high, additional scrutiny measures<sup>7</sup> are put in place to support the department in managing it. Quality assurance systems and processes must therefore reflect an appropriate balance of rigour and flexibility, i.e., proportionate to the level of net risk.

The **academic planning** and **validation** (curriculum approval) processes, as set out in chapter 4 of this handbook, enable the management of risk associated with developing new provision, new modes of delivery and/or entry into new markets, as well as changing market and regulatory conditions. **Monitoring and review** processes (see chapter 3) facilitate the identification and management of risks that arise during programme delivery and any associated impact on quality and standards.

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<sup>7</sup> E.g., a Departmental Risk Assessment or Thematic Support Panels – see Chapter 3.

## Setting and Maintaining Standards and Enhancing Quality

The University is responsible for setting and maintaining academic standards and enhancing the quality of the student experience. These responsibilities are discharged through staff engagement with:

- The [Academic Regulations](#) which govern programme structures and the award of qualifications and credit;
- The [Curriculum Strategy](#) which provides a framework for which proposals for new curriculum may be measured against and the Institution's academic portfolio may be reviewed.
- The [Taught Degrees Framework](#) which contains practical guidance on programme design and delivery in the context of the Institutions' graduate attributes; and
- The **Quality Management Handbook (QMH)** which describes the operational procedures for curriculum design and approval, monitoring and review.

The processes, as set out within this handbook, aim to deliver *threshold* judgements on academic quality and standards in line with minimum baseline expectations and to establish areas of potential excellence *above threshold* for the purpose of quality enhancement.

**Academic standards** are set at validation in line with Condition B5, i.e., consistent with [Sector Recognised Standards](#) as defined within the FHEQ. When designing and developing programmes, other non-mandatory reference points are also used, specifically the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education's](#) (UKQCHE) [Advice and Guidance](#), [qualification characteristics statements](#) and [subject benchmark statements](#). Once set at validation, external examiners (see chapter 2) judge whether threshold standards are being achieved at module and qualification award level. Beyond threshold (pass) standard, awarding bodies classify degrees according to their own academic regulations, using marking criteria which demonstrate clear alignment with the mandatory Degree Classification Descriptors (See [Sector Recognised Standards](#)) and external examiners judge whether these are applied consistently as well as commenting on the comparability of standards with similar provision elsewhere in the sector. Alongside this, every registered HE provider in England publishes a [Degree Outcomes Statement](#) (DOS)<sup>8</sup> which describes:

- The relationship between the Institution's degree outcomes and entry qualifications, student characteristics, subject mix and sector benchmarks.
- How degree outcomes address sector reference points e.g., the FHEQ and any relevant professional standards.
- The Institution's degree classification algorithm and how it is applied and reviewed.
- The role of committees and externality in assuring assessment outcomes.

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<sup>8</sup> The University's DOS can be viewed [here](#).

- Academic staff development for assessment, and how assessment practice is evaluated and good practice shared.

The Institution remains responsible for setting standards in relation to curriculum delivered by, or with, an academic partner organisation. Such responsibilities may never be delegated. However, partners contribute to the maintenance of standards through engagement with our partner-specific monitoring and review processes (see chapter 5).

Academic standards are either met or not, it is a binary judgement. Assessing **quality** is more challenging. The Regulatory Framework provides minimum baseline expectations for the quality; however, quality goes beyond minimum expectations as acknowledged in the TEF guidance. Quality is subjective and can be enhanced. External reference points for quality enhancement are:

- The UKQCHE's and its supporting Advice and Guidance is a useful reference point for enhancement beyond the minimum baselines; and,
- The [Competition and Markets Authority](#) (CMA) guidelines, and the Office of the Independent Adjudicator's (OIA) [Good Practice Framework](#) provide reference points for consumer and student protection.

**Quality Enhancement** and effective quality assurance are inextricably linked (see Figure 2), and the Institution is fully committed to '*doing things better*' - assuring quality so that it always exceeds baseline expectations; and '*doing better things*' - harnessing creativity and integrating and applying knowledge and practice to enhance quality<sup>9</sup>. Our strategy for quality management therefore extends beyond simple assurance and the mitigation of risks, to celebrating successes and identifying and sharing good practice.

Routine quality assurance activities identify potential good practice with dissemination via Academic Board committees. The University's Centre for Learning and Teaching evaluate its transferability to other settings and contexts, and it is used to inform staff professional development activities. Enhancement, however, is more than a collection of examples of good practice. It originates through an embedded, high-level cultural awareness of the need for continuous improvement.

Whilst a systematic approach to enhancement requires a degree of central coordination this does not necessitate a uniform or 'one size fits all' approach, and the most effective systems are those that supplement formal structures and processes with informal networks and communication chains formed across and between Institutional stakeholders.

The Institution's approach to enhancement, therefore, comprises an array of different processes, tools and activities (developed and implemented across faculties and departments) that share the following eight aims:

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<sup>9</sup> 'Learning and teaching enhancement: doing things better and doing better things', Schofield M., NEXUS Journal of Learning & Teaching Research Volume 1, January 2009, pp. 166-185.

1. To embed a culture and commitment to enhancement in the University's mission, policies and strategies.
2. To use formal and informal mechanisms to identify potential good practice wherever and whenever it is occurring within the student lifecycle, from pre-enrolment to completion and beyond
3. To evaluate and confirm that it is good practice and capable of being transferred to other settings and contexts.
4. To identify or develop vehicles for dissemination within and between departments, Faculties and support services (and externally) which are workable and sustainable and do not add additional burden.
5. To apply said practice in new settings and (ideally) improve upon it.
6. To monitor and evaluate its impact, engaging students in co-creating and evaluating good practice and sharing or cascading the outcomes.
7. To benchmark against best sector practice and use this to enhance the quality of learning opportunities for Edge Hill students.
8. To undertake ongoing reflection on (and enhancement of) our enhancement processes themselves as they evolve further

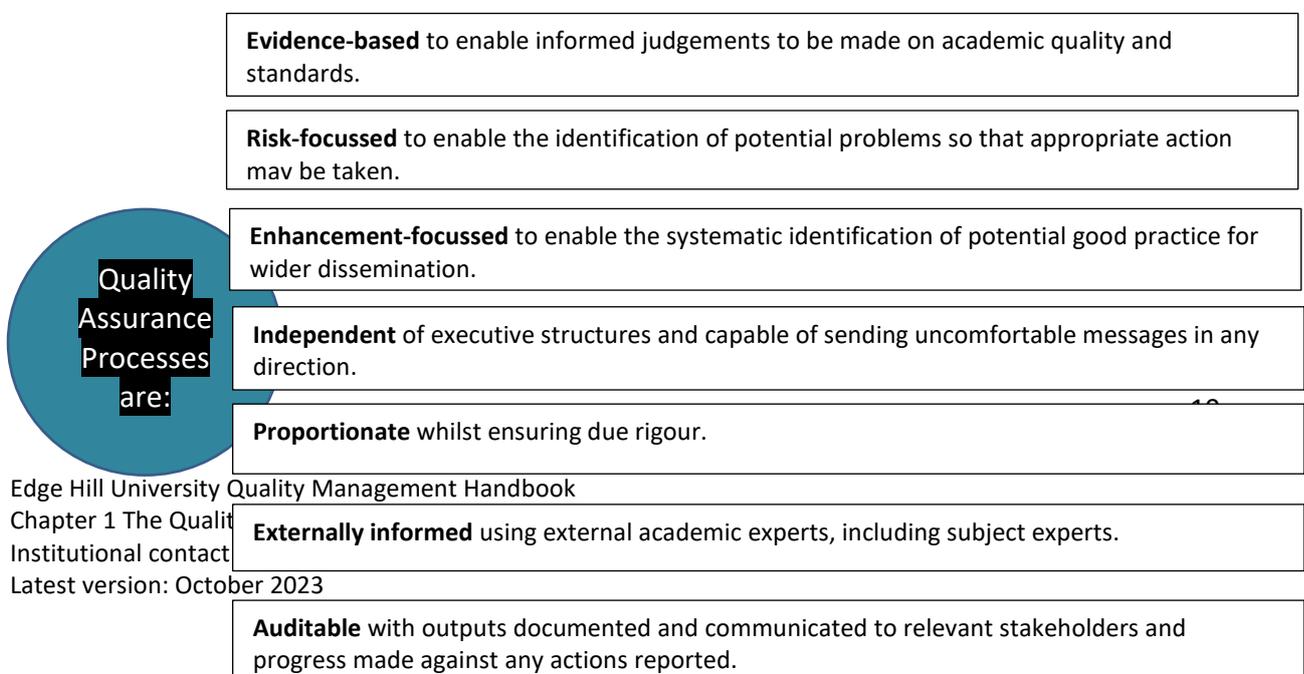
## Designing our Quality Assurance Systems

All quality assurance systems and processes in place must add value to the Institution by contributing to one or more of the following measures of value:

- Secures academic standards through alignment with the FHEQ, any relevant professional standards and requirements of Professional Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSBRs);
- Enhances the student experience (either indirectly or directly);
- Assists in demonstrating ongoing compliance with the OfS's Regulatory Framework; and/or,
- Contributes to the achievement of a strategic aim.

To this end, all processes are designed and evaluated against the 7 principles presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Process Design Principles



The QA processes currently in operation are shown in Figure 3. More details on each of these processes, including the supporting evidence used to inform them, can be found in the forthcoming chapters, 2 – 7.

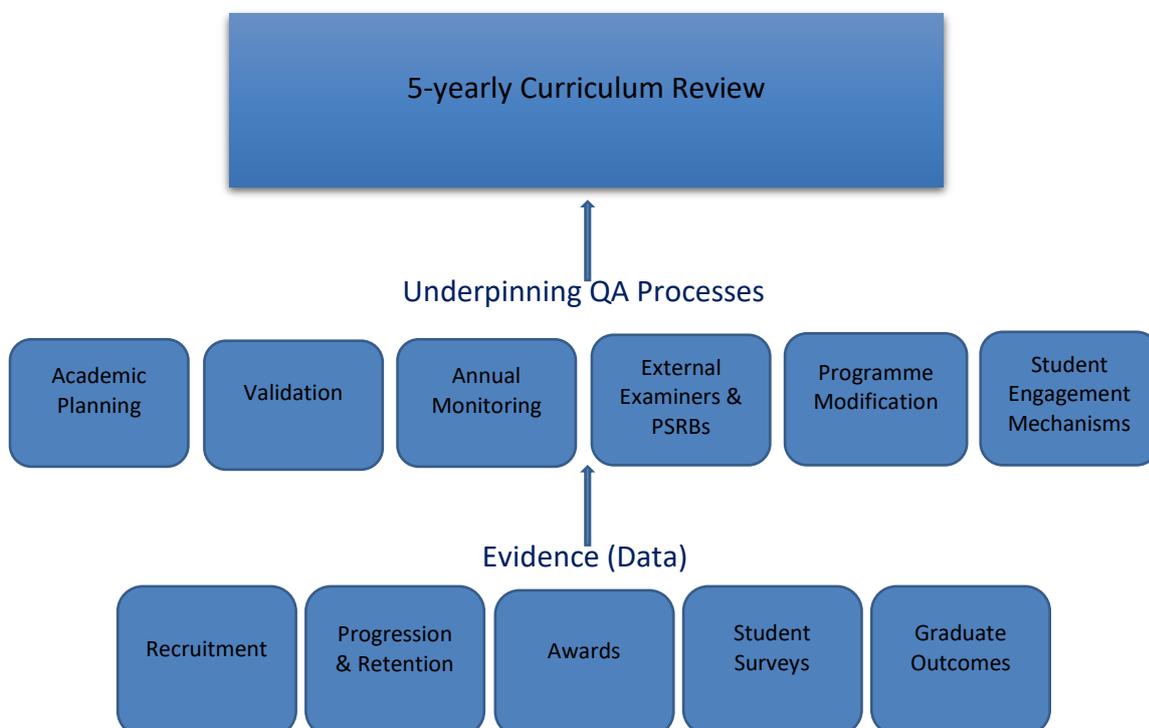


Figure 3: Quality Assurance Process Chart

## Evaluating our Quality Assurance Systems

The operation of the quality strategy is monitored and evaluated using direct feedback from Faculties and academic-related support services and the membership of AQEC. The **Annual Process Review (APR)** provides the opportunity to propose procedural changes for implementation in the next academic year. APR planning and preparation commences at the

Quality Operations Group<sup>10</sup> and discussions inform the production of a preliminary scoping document which is received by AQEC in Spring. Following a period of consultation, the final APR is approved by AQEC in summer, prompting revisions to this Handbook. A revised edition of this Handbook is considered for approval by AQEC at its first meeting of the academic year.

AQEC may occasionally be asked to approve minor in-year procedural amendments in response to internal (strategic) or external market or regulatory changes. Chapter 10 of this Handbook, titled *New Procedures*, provides a 'holding area' for approved in-year changes which are then reviewed and incorporated within the relevant principal chapter when the Handbook is re-published the following year.

## Faculty Academic Quality Statements

The University's quality management strategy permits the delegation of certain quality assurance responsibilities to Faculties. Each Faculty produces a [Faculty Academic Quality Statement](#) that describes the operational processes for executing the responsibilities that have been delegated to it. The purpose of the statements is to assure the University (via AQEC) that the arrangements adopted by Faculties remain consistent with the Institution's overarching quality management strategy, remains fit-for-purpose and are being carried out effectively.

Faculty Academic Quality Statements specify how the following delegated responsibilities are operationalised:

Chapter	Ref.	Delegated Responsibility
2	a)	Any arrangements for direct engagement between external examiners and students.
2	b)	The process by which students are informed of the name, position and home institution of their external examiner.
2	c)	The process by which the Faculty communicates the addition or replacement of modules within external examiners' approved programme remits and communicates these to the External Examiners Administrator and/or updates the institutional External Examiners' Database.
2	d)	The process by which the Faculty approves the addition or replacement of modules assigned to external examiners outside of their approved programme remit and communicates these to the External Examiners Administrator and External Examiners Sub-Committee (as 'Changes to Academic Provision Coverage').
2	e)	The process for reviewing actions taken in response to issues raised by external examiners and surfaced in the Faculty's annual Summary of External Examiners Reports and Departmental Responses.

<sup>10</sup>A forum for the exchange of information to enable quality practitioners located within Faculties and the QASC unit to fulfil their responsibilities for quality management in a cohesive way.

Chapter	Ref.	Delegated Responsibility
2	f)	(Other than via programme boards) The process by which students may access external examiner reports and departmental responses.
3	a)	Consideration of actions from Department Annual Monitoring that have been directed for the Faculty's attention, including matters raised by Heads of Department in their departmental Quality Enhancement Plans (action plans).
3	b)	Annual monitoring of modules and programmes within departments and how the Faculty is assured of its consistency and rigour.
3	c)	Operation of programme boards and Student-Staff Consultative Fora (SSCFs); to include the consideration of external examiner reports and departmental responses; annual monitoring and review reports; Student Pulse Surveys; and (where practicable) Applications for Development Consent and initial proposals for programme modifications.
4	a)	Planning of new programmes, including the use of Market Analysis Reports and the approval of Applications for Development Consent to proceed to the University's Academic Planning Committee (APC).
4	b)	Faculty approval of new programmes to proceed to Institutional validation, including the setting and enforcement of Faculty conditions and/ or recommendations.
4	c)	Faculty approval of new modules and the re-approval of existing modules.
4	d)	Faculty approval of minor modifications to existing modules or awards.
4	e)	Faculty process for monitoring minor programme modifications to ensure that the credit threshold for such modifications is observed.
4	f)	Faculty approval of the addition of STEM, Sandwich and Year Abroad routes to existing validated undergraduate degrees.
4	g)	Faculty approval of new joint honours and major/ minor combinations where the contributing single honours programmes are already in validation.
4	h)	(Other than via programme boards) How students are engaged in the planning and development of new, and the modification of existing, programmes.
4	i)	Arrangements for the review of programmes that have not recruited for two successive years prior to enrolment of students re-commencing.
4	j)	The process for approving non-credit bearing provision.
4	k)	Approval of requests for module-sharing from other Faculties.
4	l)	The process by which changes of (and to) modules are notified to all affected programmes including those hosted outside the home department and/or Faculty.
5	a)	Faculty approval, monitoring and closure of placements and student exchanges (Category 'A' academic partnerships) and the Faculty processes that support them.
5	b)	Faculty approval, monitoring and closure of UK-based learning venues (Category 'B' academic partnership) and the process that supports them.
6	a)	The process for submission, consideration and approval of claims for Recognition of Prior (Experiential) Learning and how RP[E]L applicants obtain feedback.
7	a)	Faculty process for approving Student-Initiated Credit.
-	-	How the Faculty periodically reviews and evaluates its quality assurance processes in the context of the Institution's Quality Management Strategy.

Faculties are responsible for determining the precise format of their Quality Statements, however they should, **as a minimum**, contain:

- A brief description of processes used for each of the above responsibilities, including reporting lines and timescales where appropriate.
- Highlighted sections to denote where processes have changed since the previous Statement, along with a brief explanation of the change.

Faculty Academic Quality Statements are approved by Faculty Boards or delegated Faculty Board committee, prior to their receipt by AQEC.

All academic programmes must be hosted by a Faculty for the purpose of quality assurance and the management of assessment; for this reason, AQEC will occasionally assign quality management responsibilities to Faculties for programmes delivered outside their own departmental structures<sup>11</sup>. This typically entails those programmes being subject to Faculty processes for programme and module approval and modification; monitoring and review, including external examining; and the operation of programme and assessment boards including RP[E]L approval panels. Such programme teams are responsible for the design, development and delivery of the curriculum and for operational arrangements for activities such as student enrolment and induction; student support, including personal tutoring, Personal Development Planning and student academic progress reviews; marking and internal moderation; managing extensions, extenuating mitigating circumstances and interruptions of study; and the operation of Student-Staff Consultative Fora and managing student feedback including complaints. However, this is wholly dependent on such local arrangements being:

- fully consistent with University policies and regulations; and,
- notified to the responsible Faculty at the beginning of each academic year, typically through receipt of the latest Programme Handbook.

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<sup>11</sup> For example, the Edge Hill Language Centre (Faculty of Arts and Sciences) hosts quality assurance of the cross-faculty Fastrack programme, while quality assurance of the PGCert Teaching in Higher Education is conducted via the Business School (Faculty of Arts and Sciences).