

**QUALITY FRAMEWORK**

**QUALITY MANUAL SECTION 1**

**THE QUALITY FRAMEWORK: INTRODUCTION AND PRINCIPLES**

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## QUALITY FRAMEWORK

### QUALITY MANUAL

#### THE QUALITY FRAMEWORK: INTRODUCTION AND PRINCIPLES

- 1 UK higher education institutions (HEIs) are autonomous degree-awarding bodies with overall responsibility for the quality and standards of their qualifications and award-bearing provision. [The UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#) has been developed in collaboration with the higher education sector and sets out the full range of expectations that all providers of UK higher education are required to meet. As part of this, UK degree-awarding bodies are expected to have in place comprehensive, transparent and accessible academic frameworks, policies and regulations that explain how they assess and award their academic qualifications. To this end, the University's Quality Framework is based on a sensible and proportionate approach to curriculum management.
- 2 Sheffield Hallam University is responsible to its students for the quality and standards of its academic provision. External expectations are that the University's academic standards must meet or exceed UK threshold academic standards and offer high quality learning opportunities to students. **The Quality Framework** incorporates all the main features of quality and standards management at the University, with reference to the relevant frameworks, policies and processes (detailed in section 11, below) Awards developed, approved and managed in accordance with the Quality Framework are intended to meet and exceed UK threshold academic standards and offer high quality learning opportunities to students. The Quality Framework provides a reference point for all aspects of the management of quality and standards in the University. The Quality Manual provides an overview of all the main processes encompassed by the Quality Framework.
- 3 The Quality Framework applies to all credit and award-bearing provision, including research degrees and provision delivered by the University's collaborative partners. The University acknowledges that responsibility for the academic standards of all awards made in its name cannot be delegated and consequently that it remains responsible for those academic standards regardless of where the learning opportunities are offered or who provides them.

#### PURPOSE OF THE QUALITY MANUAL

- 4 The Quality Manual provides an overall reference point for the University's Quality Framework. It sets out the University's approach to quality and standards, including key principles and provides links to individual quality and standards policies, processes and procedures.
- 5 The Manual provides comprehensive information about the University's Quality Framework which in turn sets out the University's expectations and requirements for practice by all staff and students in relation to quality assurance and quality enhancement.

- 6 In relation to the Quality Manual, the University also makes [information on Quality and Standards available to the public](#) in accordance with the UK Quality Code, Part C. This includes information about the University's main academic policies and frameworks, collaborative partnerships, accreditation status of its courses by Professional, Statutory and/or Regulatory Bodies, programme specifications, assessment regulations and procedures, research degrees and policies for student complaints and appeals. Key Information Sets on the Unistats website provide further information on courses for prospective students.
- 7 The Quality Manual is overseen and reviewed by the University Teaching Quality Committee to ensure a continual process of review and enhancement of the University's approach to managing quality and standards.

## **RESPONSIBILITIES**

- 8 The Quality Manual has been produced for the University by Academic Quality and Standards (AQS) and is approved by University Teaching Quality Committee; AQS is responsible for maintaining and updating the Quality Framework, Quality Manual and Academic Awards Framework. Registry Services is responsible for the University's standard Academic Calendars, Assessment Regulations, Assessment Boards and associated policies and procedures.

## **QUALITY FRAMEWORK PRINCIPLES**

- 9 The principles underpinning the University's Quality Framework are:
  - Robust academic standards are central to a high quality student learning experience
  - Independent external advice is integral to ensuring the transparency and robustness of the University's processes in setting and maintaining standards
  - Quality processes must be informed by clear risk assessment and be proportionate to the level of risk
  - The quality assurance of collaborative provision will be subject to the same approach and processes as provision delivered at and by the University though these processes may well be 'strengthened' depending upon the level of risk assessed
  - Quality is primarily devolved to faculties and managed at departmental and faculty level. This local ownership of quality is central to the University's approach and to the management of the student learning experience. At the departmental level, course and module teams are responsible for delivery of a high quality learning experience to students. Thus the department is responsible and accountable for this to the faculty and then the faculty to the University.
  - Quality for Research Degrees operates through a regulatory and policy framework which is managed by the University's Research Degrees Sub-Committee and is mapped to the UK Quality Code, Chapter B11, Research Degrees. The regulatory and policy framework is operationalised at faculty

level, where faculty Heads of Postgraduate Research have delegated authority. Under the planned Postgraduate Research (PGR) School structure, central oversight will reside with the institutional Head of Postgraduate Research.

## **STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN QUALITY AND ENHANCEMENT AT SHU**

10 Student engagement is wide-ranging across the University. The University works closely with the Students' Union (SHSU) to engage students in a wide variety of activities related to quality and enhancement. The University has student representation at all levels of the formal committee structure to give the fullest opportunity for students to raise matters of proper concern to them at a level that is appropriate. Some committees have positions for Students' Union sabbatical officer(s) and/or student representatives chosen or elected to represent their fellow students. Student views are sought on all aspects of the student experience and student feedback is welcomed, considered and used to shape future development. The University seeks to involve students in the following ways:

- In the development and enhancement of its courses, policies and procedures through consultation and through student representation and participation on key decision-making bodies, including:
  - The Board of Governors
  - University Pillar Boards
  - University Teaching Quality Committee
  - Engage
  - Departmental Boards
  - Validation and Periodic Review Panels
  - Staff / Student Committees (operating at individual course level)
- Through student feedback and opinion, sought through a variety of internal surveys and feedback mechanisms whereby student views are recorded and used to contribute to the cycle of continuous improvement
- Through external mechanisms such as the NSS and DLHE surveys and (for postgraduate students) the postgraduate taught and research experience surveys, PTES / PRES.

## **QUALITY AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORKS**

### **11 University Academic Awards Framework**

Sheffield Hallam University offers credit and award-bearing courses at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. Courses are offered at academic levels 4, 5, 6 and 7, in alignment with [The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies \(FHEQ\)](#). The specific structural, credit and level requirements of all the University's award-bearing courses is set out in the [Academic Awards Framework \(AAF\)](#). All award-bearing courses are subject to validation by the University, in accordance with the AAF.

- 12 The University also offers research degree programmes at doctorate and higher doctorate levels, as described in the AAF.
- 13 **University Standard Assessment Regulations and Policies**  
All courses for which the University is responsible are normally subject to the [Standard Assessment Regulations](#) that set out the requirements to be met by students for all taught academic courses. Courses may be delivered solely by the University or through arrangements with selected and approved collaborative partner organisations both in the UK and overseas. Some courses may have approved exemptions, e.g. some courses may have specific professional and/or statutory body requirements that require exemptions from certain parts of the University's Standard Assessment Regulations. Such exemptions are published on the University's website.
- 14 The University publishes a wide range of policies and procedures relating to the Standard Assessment Regulations and other associated policies and processes. The documents can be found [online](#), on the University's website, together with Student Terms and Conditions, policies and procedures for Student Complaints and Appeals and the University's Standard Academic Calendars.
- 15 The University also publishes [Regulations for Research Degrees](#).

#### **ACADEMIC GOVERNANCE: COMMITTEE STRUCTURE AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO THE MANAGEMENT OF QUALITY AND STANDARDS**

- 16 In the day-to-day operation of the University the Vice-Chancellor, the Board of Governors and the University Pillar Boards work together in a mutually supportive relationship.
- The Board of Governors has overall legal responsibility for the University's activities. The Board of Governors is supported by five committees, which oversee some areas of business on its behalf – the Academic Assurance Committee, Finance and Employment Committee, Audit Committee, Nominations Committee and the Remuneration Committee.
  - The Vice-Chancellor, the chief executive, is responsible for the executive management of the University and its day-to-day direction and provides the vision and leadership necessary to put the governors' decisions into effect. The Vice-Chancellor is supported and advised by the University Leadership Team.
- 17 **University Teaching Quality Committee**  
The University Teaching Quality Committee (UTQC) is a main sub-committee of the Shaping Futures Board with specific responsibilities, delegated by the Board, for the oversight of quality and standards of the University's award-bearing provision.

- 18 UTQC oversees the operation of the Quality Framework. The Committee is also responsible for developing and enhancing associated academic policy and procedures relevant to quality and enhancement and for advising the Shaping Futures Pillar Board on all aspects of such policies and procedures, for implementation both within the University and between the University and its collaborative partners.
- 19 **Research Degrees Committee (RDC)**  
RDC is the committee with responsibility for ensuring that the University's research degree regulations and procedures are implemented and monitored and that research degrees. The committee oversees research students' programmes of study, supervisory and examination arrangements and applications for registration and confirmation of PhDs and higher doctorate awards. RDC is also responsible for developing policy on academic matters relating to research students and research degrees, in accordance with the University's and sector requirements.
- 20 **Engage**  
Engage is the committee that focuses on enhancing and supporting the University and the Student Union's strategies. This Committee provides a mechanism to embed the student voice into the University's and the Students' Union's structures and operations, including those related to quality enhancement. The Committee acts as a forum for the University, and Students' Union, to explore and debate issues emerging from students and propose measures to enhance the student experience and to share good practice.
- 21 **Faculty Pillar Boards**  
Each Faculty has Faculty Pillar Boards which are modelled on the University Pillar Board structure. The four University Pillar Boards are: Shaping Futures, Creating Knowledge, Leading Locally and Engaging Globally and Building a Great University.
- 22 **Department Boards**  
The University's four faculties (ACES, DS, HWB and SBS) are sub-divided into a number of Academic Departments. Each department has a Department Board chaired by the relevant head of department. Department Boards are responsible for the management of the quality and standards of their academic courses and modules and for implementing and monitoring the University's and Faculty's strategic priorities in the areas of quality, enhancement, learning, teaching and assessment and equality and diversity. Each department has a Department Assessment Board, also chaired by the HoD, to oversee the assessment process, confirmation of student profiles and the awarding of qualifications. Each department is responsible for producing an annual Departmental Overview Report. These reports are submitted to the UTQC as part of the annual review cycle.
- 23 **Departmental Quality Leads**  
Each department appoints an academic member of staff to act as the departmental Quality Lead, also known as a Quality Co-ordinator, Head of Academic Development or Academic Delivery Manager (titles may vary according to faculty). The designated Quality Lead(s) for the department is responsible for managing the academic standards and quality of the educational

experience as delivered by the department, in liaison with academic colleagues and professional services teams. Departmental Quality Leads work directly with the relevant head of department (who is also chair of the departmental board) and the faculty Assistant Dean (Academic Development). Quality leads will also liaise closely with the faculty-based team from Academic Quality and Standards (AQS) to support the operation of Quality Framework processes at departmental and faculty level. Departmental Quality Leads are an important point of contact for the co-ordination and operation of quality and standards processes at local level, in liaison with AQS and other central service directorates.

## **QUALITY FRAMEWORK - KEY QUALITY PROCESSES**

### **Validation (Approval of New Courses)**

24. The University aims to ensure all of its academic provision is robust, coherent and offers a high quality student learning experience that meets University standards and articulates a current, coherent and relevant curriculum. To achieve this aim, all new University courses are subject to the University's Validation Process before they can be delivered to students. Validation is a peer review process undertaken by a University Validation Panel and usually includes an external academic member from another University or relevant external organisation. The aims and principles of the University's validation process are set out in detail in the relevant section of the Quality Manual.
25. Validation Panels have delegated responsibility for considering proposals and for making approval recommendations on behalf of the UTQC. Where proposals are recommended for approval at the point of validation, the provision is granted 'indefinite approval' subject to ongoing annual review and to periodic review at least once every six years. The periodic review date of a course, once validated, is determined by the date set for the 'owning' department's next Departmental Periodic Review. Once a course is validated, and provided that annual and periodic review processes do not indicate any major quality or standards-related issues, all courses are expected to continue in indefinite approval unless or until they are closed.

### **Approval of Collaborative Partnerships and Provision Delivered with Others**

26. The University defines a collaborative partnership as a formal arrangement involving the delivery of University provision and awards in collaboration with an external organisation. A collaborative arrangement will require approval when a student's learning opportunities are in some way dependent upon a contribution from an external organisation, in terms of teaching and/or assessing and/or supporting the student's learning experience.
27. University award-bearing courses that are delivered in partnership with others (external, collaborative partner organisations) are subject to formal approval/validation processes, but with some additional requirements to ensure that partnership and delivery issues are also considered as part of the development and approval process.
28. New collaborative partner organisations are subject initial Institutional Approval, usually involving a visit to the partner location by a University Panel. The Panel will normally include external representation. The Institutional Approval of new collaborative partnerships also involves a number of pre-approval planning, risk-assessment and financial and due diligence checks before an approval exercise

can be arranged.

- 29 The University recognises a range of different types of collaborative partnership and delivery arrangements including: articulation, franchised, collaborative delivery or co-delivery, dual awards and externally validated arrangements. Academic Quality and Standards maintains a central register of the [University's collaborative partnerships and provision](#). Details of all collaborative partnerships, including location and type of arrangement, are also published on the University's website. The University provides students studying on SHU programmes at collaborative partner organisations with access to a range of University online learning resources that have been developed specifically to provide additional support for collaborative students. Further detail on the support provided for collaborative partners and students is available from the Library and Student Support Services Directorate (L3S).

### **Modifications to the Approved Curriculum**

- 30 Following initial validation of a new course, the need to make changes to the existing, approved curriculum may arise from time to time through the ongoing review, management and enhancement of the provision. Modifications to existing courses that require academic approval are overseen and managed by the relevant departmental board, according to the principles and processes set out in the University's Quality Framework and as described in the relevant section of the Quality Manual.

### **Monitoring and Review of Courses**

- 31 **External Examiners** play a key role in the ongoing monitoring and review of the University's award-bearing courses. They are also responsible for providing independent and impartial advice to the University. External examiners are expected, through engagement in moderation and annual reporting activities, to comment on whether the University's courses are maintaining threshold academic standards, whether the University's assessment processes are fair and rigorous and in line with its regulations and whether the academic standards of the University's students are comparable with those at other UK higher education institutions. The processes by which the University manages external examiner appointments and details of external examiner responsibilities are detailed in the relevant section of the Quality Manual and on the SHU [External Examiners website](#).

### **Annual Review**

- 32 The Annual Review is a cyclical process designed to enable academic staff to review the performance of, and feedback on, University courses and modules with a view to further enhancing quality and assuring standards. The Annual Review process also operates at departmental and faculty level. Annual Review allows the University and its academic and professional services staff to:
- Consider statistical, qualitative and quantitative information generated by ongoing quality review, assessment and other processes to provide key performance measures and evidence to confirm the academic standards and quality of awards
  - Gather evidence to consider the quality of students' learning opportunities and experience, including feedback from students
  - Seek the views of, and feedback from students, employers, professional



- bodies, external examiners and other relevant stakeholders
- Evaluate the effectiveness of quality processes
- Identify good practice
- Strengthen accountability at both faculty and departmental level
- Take informed actions to further enhance the student learning experience and the overall quality of University provision

Annual Review activity is primarily undertaken by academic staff with responsibility for the delivery, development and enhancement of courses and modules. The Annual Review process also applies to provision delivered in collaboration with the University's approved collaborative partners. Regular review and evaluation of all the University's award-bearing provision is essential to ensuring the quality of the student experience and maintenance of standards across the University. Annual Review allows course leaders to compare the effectiveness of modules within and across courses and allows Heads of Departments to compare the effectiveness of delivery of courses within their area, including those delivered in collaboration with partners.

- 33 Annual Review is part of a continual cycle of review and enhancement and culminates in an annual review report and associated action plan for course and module enhancement. Annual Review feeds into other quality review mechanisms operating across the University, such as Departmental Periodic Review.
- 34 Annually, Course and Module Leaders (in liaison with course and module teams) prepare a review report and action plan using a standard template. Academic staff responsible for reviews 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), course committee minutes and actions, professional, statutory and/or regulatory body reports, and any internal or external review reports.
- 35 The Annual Review process is detailed in the relevant section of the Quality Manual. The outcomes of the Annual Review process are overseen by Departmental Boards and at University level by UTQC and Shaping Futures Board.

### **Annual Review of Research Degrees**

- 36 The University's Research Degree programmes are also subject to annual review. An annual summary report, the Annual Review of Research Degrees Activity draws on a wide range of evidence and is prepared for and considered by the Research Degrees Sub-committee (RDSC) on an annual basis. The Report outlines the key findings from an analysis of research degree activity over the previous year and highlights any specific developments and issues that have impacted on research students' performance. The Report includes qualitative feedback from research students and supervisors that is gathered via an online questionnaire and is analysed and reported on by faculty Heads of Research. The Report is also submitted to the University Teaching Quality Committee for consideration, as part of the University's Annual Review process.

### **Departmental Periodic Review**

- 37 Reviews operate at departmental level according to a six-yearly cycle agreed by the University Teaching Quality Committee. The Departmental Periodic Review process provides a focus on the way in which departments manage and assure the academic quality and standards of their award-bearing provision in accordance with the University's Quality Framework, Academic Awards Framework, Assessment Regulations and other key University policies including those related to employability and equality and diversity . The review process considers teaching quality and the arrangements in place to support and enhance and the quality of the learning opportunities provided by the department. A department's future plans for development and engagement with current University enhancement themes and initiatives are also considered. The process is intended to enable departments to undertake their own critical review and to allow staff to reflect on, and evaluate, their approaches to enhancing the student learning experience.
- 38 A Review Panel will be constituted by internal academic and professional services staff of the University and at least one student member from within the department under review. The Review Panel will also include at least one senior external academic from another UK institution. The department produces a self-evaluation briefing document for submission to the Review Panel two months' prior to the Review event. Academic Quality and Standards is responsible for working in liaison with the department under review to collect and collate a wide range of supporting evidence, drawn from existing sources such as annual reviews and external examiner reports etc. The Panel is provided with access to this 'evidence base' and to other supplementary information, several months' in advance.
- 39 Following scrutiny of the self-evaluation briefing paper and the evidence base, the Review Panel will hold a series of formal meetings with departmental staff and students, usually taking place over the course of one or one and a half days. In addition to a formal meeting between the Review Panel and students, included as part of the scheduled Review event, departments may also make arrangements for more structured student input, during the preparations for the Review, such as organised workshops and focus groups with student researchers. A summary report of Review Panel's findings will be produced for the University, including detailed recommendations and highlighting areas of good practice. The department is required to respond to the Panel's recommendations through the production of an action plan. Actions arising from the Review may be identified at departmental, faculty and/or University level. Successful outcomes from a Periodic Review will result in a recommendation for the continued indefinite approval of the department's approved, award-bearing provision.

## **ASSURANCE AND OVERSIGHT OF QUALITY AND STANDARDS**

### **Annual Reporting on Quality Framework Processes**

- 40 In addition to the annual review reports generated at module, course and departmental level, the University (via officers of specific central directorates) receives a number of annual reports arising from the operation of each of the

main Quality Framework processes and other aspects of quality and standards management. The reports draw on a wide range of evidence including student data and other statistical information that is generated by the day to day operation of individual quality and standards processes, including those concerned with regulations and associated assessment matters. The annual reports are intended to provide an opportunity for faculties, departments, directorates and collaborative partners to reflect on their operation and achievements during the previous academic year. The reports are also intended to provide the University with detailed oversight of the quality and standards of its provision. The annual quality reports prepared for the University include:

- Validation Review
  - Overview of Collaborative Partnerships and Provision External Examiners Annual Overview Report
  - Research Degrees Activity - Annual Review
  - LTA Enhancement Activity Report
  - Professional, Statutory and/or Regulatory Bodies - Overview Report
  - Exceptional Extension Requests and Extenuating Circumstances - Annual Report
  - Academic Misconduct - Annual Report
  - Appeals and Complaints - Annual Report
- and**
- Sheffield Hallam Union Student Voice - Annual Report

41 The reports are reviewed by the University Teaching Quality Committee on behalf of the Shaping Futures Board, usually in April/May each year. Following scrutiny and review of the range of annual reports, UTQC presents its findings on the overall 'academic health' of the University's provision and on faculties' and departments' engagement with the Quality Framework, to the Academic Assurance Committee and to the Board of Governors to inform a judgement on the maintenance of academic standards and quality during the academic year under review. Through the annual reporting exercise, the University aims to ensure there is continued, systematic improvement in the overall quality of its provision and enhancement of the student experience.

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