

UNIVERSITY OF YORK

Teaching Committee

Policy Statement on the Management of Quality and Standards

1 Background

Our aim is to build a University that distinguishes itself in the 'world leading quality of its research, in its outstanding teaching, and in the quality and value of the students' university experience'. We are committed to excellence across these three areas, which we believe exist in a dynamic relationship. ([University Strategy, 2014-2020](#)).

The University aims to provide an outstanding and distinctive learning environment for students. It is proud of its excellent external teaching quality assessments and seeks to sustain and enhance the quality of the experience it provides. To achieve this, the [Learning and Teaching Strategy](#) has an overarching ambition of achieving a 'consistent culture of quality' across the University.

The University's commitment to maintaining and enhancing the quality of its programmes and the experience it provides is outlined in this policy document, with references to more detailed supporting documents.

2 The University's approach to quality

Context

The University is an independent corporation with charitable status, established by Royal Charter in 1963. The University awards taught and research degrees in accordance with the powers vested in it by its Royal Charter. By virtue of its Charter, the University is permitted to contract with other institutions for academic purposes, including for the award of joint degrees (Statute 12.2.i).

The University's approach to quality has been developed within a national framework, with appropriate references to benchmarks and guidance in relation to subject areas, awards and procedures. National reference points are co-ordinated through the UK's Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education ('QAA'; see www.qaa.ac.uk), whose role is to 'safeguard the public interest in sound standards of higher education qualifications, and to encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of higher education'. Prior to July 2016¹ the QAA was responsible for carrying out institutional reviews (previously termed institutional audits) of UK higher education institutions (HEIs). The University was last reviewed in 2012. A report on the findings of the institutional review can be accessed at:

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Documents/University%20of%20York/University-of-York-IRENI-12.pdf>

¹ The Revised Operating Model for Quality Assessment (Higher Education Funding Council for England, March 2016) outlines future procedures.

The University's policies and procedures have been developed with reference to the QAA's [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#) and the [Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area](#) (ESG, 2015).

Approach to quality

Within this context, the University acknowledges that it is ultimately responsible for the academic standards of awards made in its name and for ensuring that the quality of learning experiences is appropriate to enable students to achieve those standards. The University discharges this responsibility through:

- (a) an overarching [Learning and Teaching Strategy](#) supported by an annual action plan to take forward the strategic themes. Enhancement activities include the work of the [Learning and Teaching Forum](#), which aims to bring together and support colleagues involved in teaching and learning support across the University.
- (b) appropriate **governance and management structures**, with responsibilities assigned clearly to particular individuals and bodies within the institution. Further information is provided below.

Governance:

At the *institutional level*, the University's Senate has responsibility 'for the academic work of the University, both in teaching and in research' and 'for the regulation and superintendence of the education of the students of the University'. Its responsibilities are discharged through a range of subcommittees, including the University's Teaching Committee (UTC) and Planning Committee. Further information about the University's governance structure and the membership and terms of reference of relevant committees can be found at <http://www.york.ac.uk/about/organisation/governance/>.

The University's departments are grouped into three *faculties*, each of which has a Faculty Board and a Faculty Learning and Teaching Group. These provide a forum for the discussion of academic issues, reporting to other relevant University committees; and support the implementation of University strategies in their discipline areas.

At the *departmental level*, responsibility is discharged principally through Boards of Studies (BoS). Each BoS has statutory responsibility, *inter alia*, 'to regulate . . . the teaching and study of the subjects prescribed for the Board', 'to consider the attendance, progress and conduct of students . . .' and 'to make recommendations . . . for the award of Degrees . ..'. In discharging these responsibilities a BoS normally has a range of sub-committees. BoS (or their sub-committees) interact directly with University committees.

Management:

At the institutional level, the key University officer in the area of quality and standards in teaching and learning is the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching, Learning and Students), who chairs the UTC. Other senior academic officers also have responsibilities that impact on quality and standards issues. Further information about the University's management structure and details of its senior officers can be found at <https://www.york.ac.uk/about/organisation/management/meeting-the-board/>

At the *departmental level*, Chairs of BoS have an important role in the effective discharge of the powers and functions of the BoS set out above. These responsibilities must be exercised within the resource framework managed by the relevant Head of Department. Chairs of BoS and Heads of Department are expected to work closely together.

- (c) procedures relating to the **approval, monitoring and review of programmes**. Further information is provided below.

Procedures for the approval, modification, withdrawal, monitoring and review of programmes are overseen by the UTC, at the institutional level, and BoS at the departmental level. Further information about specific procedures, including those relating to collaborative and validated programmes, and guidance in relation to distance learning provision and placements can be found at: <http://www.york.ac.uk/staff/teaching/>

- (d) employing, and/or taking account of the views of, **independent external peers and organisations**, in particular external examiners, professional, statutory and regulatory bodies and external assessors for periodic reviews of academic disciplines. Further information is provided below.

External examiners

In common with all UK HEIs, external examiners have an important role in ensuring that quality and standards are appropriate and comparable to other HEIs. Further information on the role and responsibilities of external examiners can be found as part of the University's [Guide to Assessment, Standards, Marking and Feedback](#). BoS are responsible for considering and responding to external examiners' reports. Members of the Academic Support Office read all reports and bring any major University wide issues of significant concern to the attention of the PVC for Teaching, Learning and Students and the Chair of the Standing Committee on Assessment. Annual overviews of issues arising from the reports are considered by the Standing Committee on Assessment and UTC.

Professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs)

A range of PSRBs are involved in the University's programmes. BoS are responsible for ensuring that accreditation requirements and professional standards are met at the programme level. Institutional responsibility for monitoring rests with UTC.

External assessors

The University uses external assessors to provide specialist advice on the development of new programmes and in the periodic review of academic disciplines. Further information can be found at:

<https://www.york.ac.uk/staff/teaching/procedure/review/periodic/external-assessors/>

- (e) appropriate references to **national and international requirements and benchmarks for higher education**. Further information is provided below.

University policies, procedures and programmes are developed, reviewed and revised to take account of UK and European requirements and benchmarks. Specifically, University quality and standards are developed and reviewed in accord with the *UK Quality Code for Higher Education*, which includes reference points for qualifications, subject areas and practices and procedures relating to quality issues. Further information on what this entails is available via the QAA at: <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality>

- (f) **engagement** with those with a legitimate interest in the quality of higher education, such as students and employers. Further information is provided below.

Engagement with Students:

Engagement with students is an important element of the monitoring, evaluation and enhancement of teaching and learning practices. BoS are responsible for collecting, and responding to, student feedback on modules and programmes. Students play an important role in annual programme review and periodic review.

Student representation on BoS, University committees and other student-staff committees provides an additional mechanism for engagement, allowing student views to be heard, considered and acted upon. The University's policy regarding student representation is available at:

<https://www.york.ac.uk/media/staffhome/learningandteaching/documents/policies/Student%20representation%20policy.pdf>

University guidance on Student Membership of Teaching Review Teams is available at

<https://www.york.ac.uk/media/staffhome/learningandteaching/documents/periodic-review/PR%20student%20membership%20of%20review%20teams.pdf>

Guidelines for Student Representatives on University Committees

<https://www.york.ac.uk/about/organisation/governance/members-secretaries/guidelinesforstudentreps/>

The National Student Survey (NSS) and other national surveys such as the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) and Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) also provide useful feedback from students. The data are analysed and considered in conjunction with the Students' Union and Graduate Students' Association. Action in response to the surveys is overseen by UTC (NSS and PTES) and the York Graduate Research School Policies and Programmes Sub-committee (PRES) and taken forward at the departmental level by BoS as part of the annual review process.

Engagement with Employers:

There is a range of mechanisms for engaging with employers including, at the *institutional level*:

- Employers have membership of the University's Employability Strategy Group which is chaired by the PVC for Teaching, Learning and Students, and reports to University Teaching Committee;
- Employers and alumni are members of academic departments' 'External Advisory Boards';
- Employability and links to employers forms part of the new programme approvals process for all courses;
- The University maintains a Corporate Relations Steering Group which has oversight of the strategy and quality of the institution's interactions with leading employers and research partners;
- Careers and Placements host over 400 employers each year. Feedback from these interactions is collected and acted upon by the External Engagement team within Careers and Placement.

and at the *departmental level*:

- employer membership of advisory boards and steering groups, relating to particular programmes
- use of informal employer networks and feedback to inform new programme developments and programme review.

- (g) appropriate **references to the national legislative framework** . Further information is provided below.

The University recognises its responsibilities under relevant legislation, including the Equality Act 2010. Senate sub-committees are responsible for taking account of relevant legislation in formulating, reviewing and updating the institutional approach to quality and standards. Specific actions relating to the *Learning and Teaching Strategy* are incorporated into the Learning and Teaching Strategy action plan and/or other action plans as appropriate.

3 Monitoring and review of this policy

The University regularly reviews its approach to quality, to ensure that this remains appropriate and fit for purpose.

The effectiveness of the University's approach to quality is evaluated through ongoing reflection on:

- Outcomes of external reviews by professional and statutory bodies
- Reports from external examiners
- Reports on internal periodic reviews and annual programme reviews
- Student feedback (including the NSS)
- Key performance indicators to the University Council.