2 QUALITY ASSURANCE

Principles of quality assurance for degree provision

2.1 The university aims to set and maintain appropriate academic standards in all provision. This is achieved through a range of quality assurance systems which are designed to:

a. engage with national standards and expectations (including the UK Quality Code for Higher Education) through development and review processes
b. ensure that action is taken to safeguard standards and to enhance the quality of programmes and learning opportunities
c. ensure that issues are resolved by the relevant body; where issues impact beyond individual programmes, ensuring that committees, resource-holders and decision-makers are informed and engaged in resolving them
d. provide feedback to students and programme teams on actions being taken to improve quality
e. review quality assurance activities and procedures to check their relevance, value and achievability for all partners
f. identify areas of good practice and contribute to quality enhancement.

2.2 A key feature of quality assurance is its use to strengthen and develop the professional expertise of the university academic community. Therefore, the university:

- uses peer review in quality assurance processes, in order to develop staff understanding of quality issues through critical evaluation of other programmes and contexts and to share experience
- involves a wide range of staff across the partnership in the development of quality systems and regulations
- involves students as much as possible in contributing to quality review and development activity
- involves external expertise to widen debates and ensure external agendas are referenced.

2.3 The university benefits from engagement with a range of quality processes, both internal and external: these processes are outlined in this section.

Principles of quality assurance for SQA provision

2.4 The university is committed to working in partnership with Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) to quality assure all its SQA qualifications to maintain national standards and to ensure the public recognition and credibility of these awards.

2.5 Quality assurance for SQA awards is based upon the following principles:

- the assessment and quality assurance system for SQA awards should be understandable to stakeholders, effectively administered, accountable and cost-effective to operate
- qualifications should be accessible to all learners who have the potential to achieve them
- the criteria which define the performance required of learners to achieve specific qualifications should be appropriate to purpose, be explicit and in the public domain
- each unit, course and group award should be unique and necessary, and should comply with the relevant qualification specification
- assessments should be valid, reliable and practicable, and assessment results should satisfy the qualification criteria

- qualifications should be offered only where resources and expertise are in place to assess learners against the qualification's criteria
- staff should be provided with effective support in assessing learners for certification
- responsibility for quality assurance should be a partnership between the university and SQA and devolved to the university where this is consistent with the university devolved powers.

2.6 **Quality assurance elements**

SQA qualifications are designed, delivered and assessed to national standards and to ensure this SQA has identified key quality assurance elements, based on the above quality assurance principles. The university engages fully with these elements in order to underpin all its SQA qualifications and these are the key mechanisms through which SQA national standards are established and maintained.

SQA has divided each element into requirements or criteria. The university and SQA have allocated responsibilities for these criteria as quality provision requires an effective partnership. There are six categories of criteria which address management of the centre, resources, candidate support, internal assessment and verification, external assessment and data management.

The elements are:

- **approval as an SQA centre**
  These criteria relate to the management procedures which underpin the implementation and assessment of SQA qualifications across the partnership
- **approval to offer specific SQA qualifications**
  These criteria relate to resources required for the implementation and assessment of specific SQA qualifications
- **validation of SQA qualifications**
  These criteria relate to ensuring that SQA qualifications are fit-for-purpose
- **internal verification of internal assessment**
  These criteria relate to the processes by which the university ensures that all internal assessment is valid, reliable, practicable and cost-effective
- **external verification of internal assessment**
  These criteria relate to external processes by which SQA engages with the university to ensure that internal assessment is in line with the national standards set out in the qualifications.
- **quality control of external assessment**
  These criteria relate to the processes by which the university and SQA ensure that external assessment is in line with the national standards set out in the qualifications
- **monitoring of SQA's quality assurance elements**
  These criteria relate to the processes which are used to measure the success of the other elements in supporting the consistent application of national standards.

For further details on any of the above quality elements and criteria, please contact the relevant academic partner quality manager or UHI Head of Academic Standards and Enhancement.

Quality assurance processes and outcomes

2.7 The key quality assurance processes that operate within the university are outlined below. All these processes are overseen by Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC), which also ensures that the outcomes of these processes are dealt with. The

provisions of this section apply to all taught provision offered to registered students, including that validated by SQA, or through other HEIs and awarding bodies.

Process	Purpose	Description	Outcomes
Approval procedures for new programmes, overseen by Faculty Boards	To ensure new provision is fully developed and adequately resourced and academic standards are appropriately set	Faculty Board support required to approve initial proposal. Approval event based on programme documentation. Panels include internal members	Approval report may have conditions that must be met before programme commences
Annual quality monitoring of modules, programmes and cognate subject groups, overseen by QMG and QAEC	To identify strengths and weaknesses at each level, and plan for improvement	Annual SEDs produced, making appropriate reference to programme statistics, student evaluations of modules, staff evaluations, response to any external examiner issues, targets and objectives. Supported by site reports and other submissions from, and meetings with, academic partners (see below). Annual meeting between QMG and cognate subject group	Cognate subject group SEDs considered by Quality Monitoring Group prior to meeting with subject networks and agreement of annual targets
Annual quality monitoring meeting with academic partners, overseen by QAEC	To discuss student experience, support and infrastructure issues identified	Annual meeting of academic partner quality managers, internal members of QMG and associate deans	Summary institution-level report to QAEC comprising common issues and good practice and recommendations for action
External examiners' reports	To assure academic standards in a national context	Annual visits and reports by external examiners	Reports, often with recommendations for improvement. Discussed and acted on by programme team, with overview of all reports by Faculty Board to QAEC
External Verification (SQA)	To ensure academic and procedural standards in a national context	Annual visits and sampling of evidence generating reports by SQA External Verifiers	Reports identifying good practice and recommendations. Required actions are identified where criteria have not been met. The programme team must meet required actions by the specified deadline. Overview of all reports considered by Faculty

Process	Purpose	Description	Outcomes
			Board, QAEC and Quality Forum.
Internal subject area review every 5 years, overseen by QAEC	To identify strengths and weaknesses and potential for enhancing the quality of student learning experience	Self-evaluation document produced by subject area. 1-2 day event to meet staff, students and review evidence. Panel includes internal and external and student members	Report containing judgements, with conditions and/or recommendations for action.
Internal student support service review, overseen by QAEC	To identify strengths and weaknesses in support services and potential for enhancing the quality of student learning experience	Self-evaluation document produced by student support service team. 1-2 day event to meet staff, students and review evidence. Panel includes internal and external and student members	Report containing judgement with recommendations for action
Programme re-approval every 5-6 years, overseen by Faculty Boards	To ensure programme continues to meet academic standards and is properly managed and resourced	Event includes evaluation of existing programme and analysis of student statistics. Panel includes internal and external and student members	Re-approval report may have conditions that must be met in a given time frame
Systems Verification (SQA)	To ensure systems, policies and procedures meet SQA quality assurance criteria and are implemented effectively	SQA work with the university to: Review evidence against identified criteria.	Consolidated evidence mapped to relevant criteria. Verification report detailing findings, good practice, developmental recommendations and required actions. Report considered by QAEC and all other relevant groups identified in the findings.

Table 1: Key quality assurance processes in the university