

# Section 1: Quality Assurance Principles and Academic Governance

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The Quality Assurance and Enhancement Framework has been developed to guide colleagues on the processes that help assure and enhance the academic student experience. It takes account of external reference points such as the UK Quality Assurance Agency's (QAA) Quality Code, the Office for Students On-going Conditions of Registration and the European Standards Guidance. The handbook also provides transparency to applicants and students on the University's quality assurance processes.

The Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook should be read in conjunction with the Handbook of Academic Regulations, Education Strategy, Employability Strategy, Academic Regulations for Research Degrees, Research Degrees Handbook, and University Framework for Research Student Representative Handbook.

## Quality Assurance Principles

- 1.1 The principles that underpin the University of Westminster's approach to quality assurance are:
- **Responsibility** – the quality assurance processes are designed to recognise the shared responsibility for the setting and maintenance of the academic standards of the University's academic provision, they recognise the involvement of academic staff, School/College ownership of its portfolio of courses and modules, students and other stakeholders, working in partnership through membership of College and University committees, groups and Panels;
  - **Accountability** – Whilst there is a shared responsibility for academic quality and standards, and quality enhancement, the roles and responsibilities of individuals and committees will be clearly stated in the Quality Assurance Framework;
  - **Proportionality** – quality assurance processes are designed to be proportionate to the risk attached to the activity they are assuring. Documentation requirements seek to ensure that students and other stakeholders can get clear and accurate information about programmes of study which lead to an award of the University of Westminster, and clarity to the University's partners with respect to the maintenance of the academic standards of the University's awards;
  - **Consistency** – the quality assurance framework strives towards consistency rather than standardisation. There are agreed quality assurance processes but with some flexibility for Colleges to determine how they will meet the intended outcomes of the process. The Quality and Standards Office provides a co-ordinated approach to quality assurance across the Colleges to promote consistency.
  - **Communication** – quality processes are clearly communicated to colleagues and students with good practice being identified and shared across the

University to aid quality enhancement. The quality assurance framework is based on peer review and should involve a constructive dialogue between all those involved in the processes.

## Academic Governance

1.2 Academic Governance supports effective implementation and monitoring of quality assurance processes to ensure the student academic experience is at the heart of decision making.

### 1.2.1 The Court of Governors

The composition of the Court of Governors is set out in the [Articles of Association](#). The Court of Governors is responsible for confirming to the Office for Students that the On-going [Conditions of Registration](#) have been fulfilled. This is achieved through the academic governance structures and reports to the Court of Governors.

### 1.2.2 Academic Council

Academic Council is responsible for ensuring the academic standards of the University, and is the final arbiter in all matters relating to validation, approval, re-validation and monitoring. Academic Council may designate a specially constituted committee, sub-group or panel to act on its behalf in matters relating to validation, approval, review or monitoring and may delegate some of its powers of decision to that body.

Academic Council is responsible for general issues relating to:

- the research, scholarship, teaching and courses at the University, including criteria for the admission of students;
- the appointment and removal of internal and external examiners;
- policies and procedures for assessment and examination of the academic performance of students;
- the content of the curriculum;
- academic standards and the validation and review of courses;
- the procedures for the award of qualifications and honorary academic titles;
- the procedures for the exclusion of students for academic reasons;
- consideration of the development of the academic activities of the University and the resources needed to support them and the provision of advice thereon to the Vice-Chancellor and to the Court of Governors;
- provision of advice on such other matters as the Court of Governors or the Vice-Chancellor may refer to Academic Council.

1.2.3 To assist in meeting its obligations and responsibilities, Academic Council may establish such committees as it considers necessary to enable it to carry out its responsibilities provided that each establishment is first approved by the Vice-Chancellor and Court of Governors.

1.2.4 Responsibility for the conduct of quality assurance processes is delegated by Academic Council to specific post holders and formally constituted groups. Executive responsibility for Academic Quality is held by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education), who is both a member of the University Executive Board (UEB) and of Academic Council. Formal responsibility for the academic regulations, and the accountability of the proper conduct of the University's quality assurance processes for taught courses and research degrees, is held by the Academic Registrar, who is Clerk to Academic Council. The following committees play a key role in upholding the quality assurance process across the university.

### 1.2.5 **Teaching Committee**

The Teaching Committee is a sub-committee of Academic Council. Its primary focus is to develop, for Academic Council approval, and in respect of the University's taught course provision, strategies, policies and regulations relating to learning, teaching, assessment, quality assurance and enhancement, and to have oversight, on behalf of Academic Council, of academic standards and of the academic experience of taught students.

### 1.2.6 **Partnership Scrutiny Committee**

The Partnership Scrutiny Committee is a joint sub-committee of the Teaching Committee and University Executive Board. Its primary focus is to provide strategic oversight of academic partnership activity, ensuring partnerships are mutually beneficial and enhance the University's academic activities and reputation. This includes monitoring the effectiveness of strategy, policy and processes for the quality assurance and enhancement of collaborations with other institutions and organisations.

### 1.2.7 **Student Voice Forum**

The Student Voice Forum is a sub-committee of Academic Council. Its primary focus is to promote student engagement and sense of community and to review, monitor and enhance student satisfaction and all aspects of the student experience.

### 1.2.8 **Research Committee**

The Research Committee is a sub-committee of Academic Council. Its primary focus is to develop and monitor the University's research policy and strategy.

### 1.2.9 **Graduate School Board**

The Graduate School Board is a sub-committee of Academic Council. Its primary focus is the University's management and monitoring of research degree provision and progression. This is achieved by supporting comprehensive early career researcher development and the promotion of a strong culture of theoretical, practice-based and professional-doctoral research.

### 1.2.10 **Portfolio Planning Committee**

The Portfolio Planning Committee is a joint sub-committee of Academic Council and University Planning Committee. Its focus is to consider the development of the University's academic portfolio, to approve proposals for new courses and to encourage and support curriculum innovations.

Responsibility for the initial consideration of new course proposals or significant changes of content or changes to the title of the award is held by the Portfolio Planning Committee. Authority for the detailed consideration of the proposals and their validation or non-validation, is delegated to the Course Validation Standing Panel.

### 1.2.11 **Course Validation Standing Panel**

The Course Validation Standing Panel has delegated responsibility from Academic Council for considering, advising on, and ultimately formally approving the proposed content and structure of new courses.

### 1.2.12 **College Teaching Committee**

College Teaching Committee includes the development of college policies and procedures to ensure the effective implementation of university strategies relating to and learning, teaching assessment, quality assurance and enhancement in respect of its courses. The College Teaching Committee has oversight of the College Continuous Improvement, student feedback, College Validation and review outcomes, and overview of external examiners.

### 1.2.13 **Apprenticeship Board**

The Apprenticeship Board reports to the University Teaching Committee. Its focus is to consider the University's provision for Apprenticeships, with respect to Education and Compliance and the relationship between employers and the University. It has oversight to ensure the University meets the requirements of external regulations, has effective safeguarding arrangements and to review feedback from learners and employers.

1.2.14 The Deputy Vice Chancellor (Education) has been given a university-wide responsibility for Quality Assurance and is Chair to the Teaching Committee and Co-Chair to the Student Voice Forum. The Deputy Vice Chancellor will normally be involved in all Quality Assurance processes, including approval of External Examiner nominations, except where there is a conflict of interest.

1.2.15 Oversight of the Continuous Improvement of all taught courses and modules, is delegated by Academic Council to the Teaching Committee, which reports to Academic Council.

1.2.16 The audit and monitoring processes for research degree candidates are undertaken by the Graduate School Office for report to and consideration by the Graduate School Board, which reports to Academic Council.

## 1.3 **Awards of the University**

1.3.1 A full list of the University's awards is given in the Handbook of Academic Regulations and the Academic Regulations for Research Degrees.

## 1.4 **Collaboration with other awarding bodies and with other institutions**

1.4.1 The University will act jointly with professional associations and with other awarding bodies to make available courses leading to recognised awards of such associations and bodies.

1.4.2 The University may permit other institutions to offer courses leading to an award of the University. Such programmes of study will be validated and approved by the University in accordance with the Quality Assurance Framework. More detailed process information is available in section 11.

## 1.5 **Terminology**

1.5.1 The term '**programme of study**' is used to denote an approved set of modules by which a student may obtain a specified award of the University.

1.5.2 The term '**course**' is used to denote a subject or one or more discipline-based sets of modules having a single or closely-related focus, leading to a common award and being administered as a single structure.

1.5.3 The term '**module**' is used to denote a discrete study element within a course.

1.5.4 The term '**course programme**' is used to denote a larger grouping of courses.

1.5.5 Each student of the University will therefore follow a programme of study which will be composed of a number of modules within a course or course programme.

- 1.5.6 The term '**academic programme**' is used to denote in the widest sense academic activities relating to a course, a subject or a discipline within the University.
- 1.5.7 A taught programme of study is the approved curriculum leading to a specified and named award of the University as followed by an individual student; the programme may be identical with a course or may be one of several standard routes within a larger course programme. The University will admit students to its courses on a full-time, part-time, mixed-mode or distance-learning basis as appropriate. All programmes of study will conform to the University's academic regulations and requirements. Throughout this Handbook, the term course is used to denote either a single course or a larger course programme with a number of standard routes.
- 1.5.8 Research degree candidates are normally referred to be on a programme of research.

## 1.6 **Approval and monitoring of the University's programmes of study definitions**

### 1.6.1 **Validation**

Validation is the process of judgement reached by the Course Validation Standing Panel, acting with delegated authority from Academic Council. The Panel including internal peers and external advisers make a judgement based on the documentation provided as to whether a course designed to lead to an award of the University meets the requirements for that award, as determined by the principles and regulations of the University and relevant external reference points.

### 1.6.2 **Approval**

Approval is the outcome of a validation process where a proposed course scheme has been judged to meet the University's requirements. It is the formal act of the Panel's approval on behalf of Academic Council to confirm that a proposed course scheme meets the University's requirements and relevant external reference points.

### 1.6.3 **Curriculum and Assessment Check-in**

Curriculum and Assessment Check-in is the process where the curriculum, its quality and academic standards, is critically appraised at intervals by a group including internal peers and external advisers to confirm that academic programmes being reviewed remain academically current and that any courses associated with that programme continue to meet the University's requirements.

### 1.6.4 **Continuous Improvement Process**

The Continuous Improvement Process is the regular, normally annual, process by which each of the Colleges and Centre for Education and Teaching Innovation critically appraise the operation of its taught courses and its academic programmes and ensures that appropriate academic standards are maintained. The outcomes of this process are reviewed on behalf of Academic Council by the Teaching Committee. Meetings with student representatives and subject area meetings with external examiners contribute to a culture of ongoing continuous improvement. It is anticipated that reflections lead to curriculum updates through the Course and Module modification process and other deliberate learning and teaching focused changes.

In addition, the Portfolio Planning Committee Portfolio Sub-Committee will meet annually to consider a matrix of student experience and outcome data requiring deliberate actions as deemed appropriate. One possible outcome is the requirement to conduct a Learning, Teaching and Assessment Refresh Event.

Such events are designed to enable a discussion based on the curriculum and data with a group of peers, including external specialists with an expectation that a panel meet with course representatives.

## 1.7 **Setting and maintaining academic standards**

- 1.7.1 The University is dedicated to supporting its students to attain the highest levels of achievement of which they are capable. To this end, it provides adequate and appropriate facilities to ensure the continuing quality of its courses.
- 1.7.2 The University subscribes to the principle that the quality of the staff, their qualifications and experiences and the caliber of leadership at all levels are of paramount importance. Colleges and Schools have a responsibility to ensure that the quality of staff involved in teaching and assessment is appropriate. In addition, Colleges and Schools are expected to have oversight of the overall balance of its teaching teams.
- 1.7.3 The University expects its colleagues to demonstrate a commitment to personal, academic and professional development, and to engage in a variety of scholarly and professional activities appropriate to their subject specialism, and in relation to developments in teaching and learning in Higher Education, with a view to maintaining and updating their expertise.
- 1.7.4 In respect of the validation of a course the University will seek to ensure that both the teaching and support staff are adequate in number and appropriately qualified for the objectives of the course to be fulfilled.
- 1.7.5 The University will formally agree policies for staff development and research and will actively promote staff development and research to support teaching and learning. The Centre for Education and Teaching Innovation supports Colleges in providing academic development opportunities, resources and good practice. This includes through PRESTige which provides opportunities to enhance teaching practice and gain recognition for teaching experience.
- 1.7.6 The University will provide the physical resources needed to sustain the course.
- 1.7.7 Responsibility for the maintenance of academic standards in the University lies with Academic Council. Academic Council may delegate the execution of its policies to committees, sub-groups and panels as may from time to time be determined by Academic Council. (Also, refer to section 2 which details the external reference points).
- 1.7.8 **Course regulations**  
Each designated course or pathway, leading to a specified and named University award will be approved in accordance with the academic regulations of the University. Course specific regulations may exceptionally apply. To ensure university oversight, these can only be approved by Academic Council, a clear rationale and proposed specific wording of the regulations will be expected. The Quality and Standards Office can provide guidance on the process.
- 1.7.9 **Validation (new courses)**

### Aims

The overall aim of the University's validation of new courses is to:

- set academic standards of the University's academic programmes; including reference to any subject benchmark statements, relevant external agency academic regulations and policies and codes of practice.
- assure and enhance the quality of student learning opportunities ensuring it provides an educational challenge.
- stimulate curriculum design and development by requiring staff to evaluate proposed courses with external peers, ensuring they are coherent and the approach to assessment is varied, effective, relevant and reliable
- secure for students a high quality of educational and academic experience
- assess the quality and standards of the University's academic programmes.
- Ensure the principles of course design and assessment are embedded within courses and provide opportunities for student consultation.

**1.7.10 The University's Curriculum and Assessment Check-in and Internal Scrutiny Panels processes will:**

- maintain academic standards of the University's approved academic programmes; including reference to any subject benchmark statements, relevant external agency academic regulations and policies and codes of practice.
- ensure the quality of student learning opportunities in each subject area provides an educational challenge and make enhancements as deemed appropriate.
- stimulate curriculum design and development by requiring staff to evaluate proposed courses ensuring they remain coherent and up to date, with an approach to assessment that remains varied, effective, relevant and reliable
- assess the quality and standards of courses in operation as demonstrated by the curriculum's alignment with internal and external requirements, feedback from students, reflections in the Continuous Improvement Reports and the reports of the external examiners;
- ensure there is ongoing student evaluation and consultation opportunities through meeting with student representatives.

**In addition, a Learning, Teaching and Assessment Refresh Event will:**

- Consider a broad matrix of student experience and student performance data alongside the curriculum content and other key documentation providing discussion points for enhancements.
- Consider the rationale for any changes that have been proposed to enhance student experience and student outcomes.

**1.7.11 Course and Module Modifications**

Following the Validation of a course it is acknowledged that courses, and modules will require modifying to respond to advances in the academic discipline, research, improved technology enhanced learning opportunities, student feedback, Professional Statutory Body and external examiners reports. To ensure the approved course outcomes are maintained and avoid 'validation drift' the University operates a proportionate course and module modifications process.

#### 1.7.12 **External Examiners**

The University will appoint an appropriate number of External Examiners to each of its designated course subject areas and Progression and Assessment Boards. This will ensure that the assessment process is conducted in a manner which provides parity of judgement for the designated courses and that the standard of the University's awards are maintained in accordance with national standards (refer to section 9).

External Examiners are required to report annually on the issues related to assessment and the quality of the subject or course as revealed through the assessments.

An overview report is provided annually to the Teaching Committee and Academic Council.

#### 1.7.13 **Student Voice**

The University has a variety of mechanisms to help ensure the Student Voice feeds into academic governance and the ongoing improvement of its courses. This includes Course Representatives, Student Module Evaluations, School Community Representatives, Student Panel Advisers and representation through the University governance processes.

#### 1.7.14 **Assessment Boards**

For every stage of assessment for each validated course leading to a University award, there will be one or more Assessment Boards whose constitution and terms of reference accord with the approved regulations for the course and which includes the external examiner(s) appointed by the University. Assessment Boards will work in accordance with the University Academic Regulations.

#### 1.7.15 **Monitoring**

All courses leading to a University award will be subject to a continuous improvement process to ensure the academic health of the courses between formal review. This will be informed by appropriate evidence base including course reflection and performance indicators. An overview report is produced annually.

#### 1.7.16 **Course Management**

In respect of its designated courses leading to specified and named awards the University will establish:

- a) clear channels of accountability from course teams to Academic Council;
- b) executive and administrative structures which support the collective processes of academic policy-making and sustain academic leadership;
- c) arrangements for staff and students to contribute in an informed way to the formation of academic policy and priorities;
- d) effective communication which fosters internal inter-relationships and the transmission of good practice.

The University will appoint a suitable member of the academic staff to be the leader of a designated course of the University. The responsibilities of a Course Leader will include:

- a) ensuring that the course meets its specified aims and learning outcomes;

- b) ensuring that the course is conducted in accordance with its approved regulations;
- c) administration of the course in respect of academic matters;
- d) the provision of documentation in respect of the monitoring and review process.

## 1.8 Curriculum Oversight and Course Design

### 1.8.1 Curriculum Principles

In designing curricula, the University expects course teams to consider and apply the following principles:

- Being informed and enriched by research and professional practice.
- Being inspired by and providing opportunities for interdisciplinary exploration and innovation.
- Embedding the development of skills and knowledge relating to employability, Equality Diversity, and Inclusion, education for sustainability and social responsibility aligned to graduate attributes.

### 1.8.2 Curricula are informed by the University's Education Strategy.

All curricula can evidence how they embody the defining characteristics of the University of Westminster, as emphasised in our vision and mission, by:

- An appropriate range of teaching and assessment methods is used to engage students throughout their course, encourage them to develop progressively as independent learners, and support them in the achievement of graduate attributes.
- Module/course delivery makes appropriate and effective use of diverse methods and technologies to build and develop information and digital literacies where appropriate.
- The curriculum is inclusive, taking account of students' needs and experiences. The curriculum is informed by industry expectations and professional requirements, where relevant.
- The curriculum is underpinned and informed by academic expertise, research, and scholarly activity.

### 1.8.3 The Curriculum Framework includes links to key curriculum policies, expectations on the balance of core/option/electives at each level, assessment tariffs where applicable, inclusion of formative assessment, the number of course outcomes at each level and requirements for module learning outcomes. Any exceptions are approved by the Chair of the Teaching Committee or nominee.

### 1.8.4 To provide a coherent learning experience and one that is built around the course and its learning outcomes, students will normally be provided with a series of core and option modules at each level. These will support knowledge and skills development and successful progression through the course. Student choice for the number of module options will be identified, limited by the course learning outcomes, any PSRB restrictions, and resources (infrastructure and staffing).

## **Course Learning Outcomes**

- 1.8.5 Every approved course will have stated aims and intended course learning outcomes which the curriculum, structure, teaching and learning and assessment strategy are designed to fulfil. Where available, benchmark statements should be referred to.
- 1.8.6 The aims will include the development to the level required for the award of a body of knowledge and skills appropriate to the field of study and reflecting academic developments in that field: these are course-specific aims.
- 1.8.7 The course learning outcomes will include knowledge and understanding, specific skills (professional and personal) and key transferable skills appropriate to the field of study, identifying the ways in which these will be developed and evaluated.
- 1.8.8 The outcomes will be linked to graduate attributes in order to make clear to students how they can be effective members of a competitive work force.
- 1.8.9 Undergraduate requirements to ensure course and assessment design oversight
- Level 4: 100 credit core, with 1 free choice: either a Westminster elective or an option. All students should normally have the opportunity to take a Westminster elective unless there are Professional Body accreditation requirements that prevent this.
  - Level 5: 80 credit core with 2 free choices (either 2 options; or 1 option + 1 Westminster elective)
  - Level 6: 80 credit core with 2 free choices (as for Level 5)

Any exceptions are approved on behalf of the University Teaching Committee.

## **1.9 Principles of Assessment**

- 1.9.1 One purpose of assessment is to enable students to demonstrate that they have fulfilled the course's learning outcomes and achieved the standard required for the award they seek.
- 1.9.2 External examiners will make their judgements on student performance in relation to the assessment regulations approved for the course.
- 1.9.3 Assessment should be meaningful, appropriate, and designed to enable students to demonstrate that they have met the course's learning outcomes.
- 1.9.4 The assessment schedule should allow students to build on and demonstrate knowledge and skills at progressive levels.
- 1.9.5 Students may demonstrate they have achieved the learning outcomes of individual modules through in-module assessment activity or a synoptic assessment activity.
- 1.9.6 Learning outcomes (at the level of module, Level 4, 5 or 6, or course) only need to be assessed once.

- 1.9.7 For Undergraduate Programmes the University has agreed an assessment tariff which sets out the maximum limits for assessment by credit volume. This helps to ensure clear oversight of the assessment strategy and student effort. The assessment tariffs are available in the Curriculum Framework, any exceptions require approval by the Chair of the Teaching Committee or nominee.
- 1.9.8 Each programme of study should include a variety of assessment types at each academic level. Course Teams should take a holistic approach to curriculum design which considers assessment across levels and not just within modules.
- 1.9.9 Assessment will reflect the individual student's achievement in fulfilling course learning outcomes, and at the same time relate that achievement to a consistent national standard of awards. It will be carried out by competent and impartial examiners, and by methods which enable them to assess students fairly.

## 1.10 **Research Degrees of the University**

### **Overview**

- 1.10.1 In respect of supervised programmes of research, the University may award the degrees of Master of Philosophy (MPhil), Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) or named Professional Doctorate in accordance with Academic Regulations for Research Degrees, as may be supplemented by Programme Specific Regulations in the case of a Professional Doctorate.
- 1.10.2 *Scope:* Programmes of research may be proposed in any field of study subject to the requirement that the proposed programme is capable of leading to scholarly research and to its presentation for assessment by appropriate examiners.
- 1.10.3 *The MPhil award:* The MPhil award is made to a candidate who, having critically investigated and evaluated an approved topic and demonstrated an understanding of research methods appropriate to the chosen field in line with the FHEQ Level 7 qualification descriptor, and has presented and defended a thesis by oral examination to the satisfaction of the examiners.
- 1.10.4 *The PhD and Professional Doctorate Awards:* A doctoral award is made to a candidate who, having critically investigated and evaluated an approved topic resulting in an independent and original contribution to knowledge and/or practice and demonstrated an understanding of research methods appropriate to the chosen field in line with the FHEQ Level 8 qualification descriptor, and has presented and defended a thesis by oral examination to the satisfaction of the examiners.
- 1.10.5 Academic Council has delegated authority to the Graduate School Board to act on its behalf in matters relating to research degrees, as outlined above.