

THE UNIVERSITY'S ENGAGEMENT WITH THE ACADEMIC INFRASTRUCTURE

Approved by Academic Development Committee

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THE UNIVERSITY'S ENGAGEMENT WITH QAA'S ACADEMIC INFRASTRUCTURE

1. Introduction

QAA's Academic Infrastructure provides a means of describing academic standards in UK higher education. It allows for diversity and innovation within academic programmes offered by higher education. QAA has worked with the higher education sector to establish the various parts of the Academic Infrastructure which are:

- The Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher Education, which provides guidance on maintaining quality and standards for universities and colleges subscribing to QAA
- The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ) which describes the achievement represented by higher education qualifications.
- Subject benchmark statements, which set out expectations about standards of degrees in a range of subject areas. They define what can be expected of a graduate in terms of the abilities and skills needed to develop understanding in the subject
- Guidelines for preparing programme specifications
- Guidelines for HE Progress Files
- Guidelines on the accreditation of prior learning in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Other QAA reference points

- *Guidance on the comparison of qualifications in the UK and Ireland*
- *Verification of the compatibility of The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ) with The framework for qualifications of the European higher education area (FQ-EHEA)*
- *Personal development planning: guidance for institutional policy and practice in higher education*
- *The doctoral qualification*
- *Academic credit in higher education*
- *The Higher education credit framework for England and a statement about its relationship to the FHEQ*
- *Facilitating credit-based links in Scottish higher education*
- *Guidelines on the accreditation of prior learning in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*
- *Master's degree characteristics*

The Academic Infrastructure evolved from recommendations about quality and standards made in the Reports of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education and its Scottish Committee (Dearing and Garrick reports) in 1997. During 2009-10 QAA undertook an evaluation of the existing Academic Infrastructure to reflect on its use, impact and effectiveness. The evaluation, which drew on feedback from higher education professionals, students and other stakeholders, considered whether the Academic Infrastructure:

- met and continues to meet its original expectations and anticipated benefits
- remains relevant and 'fit for purpose'
- is sufficiently flexible to accommodate future developments in higher education.

Following an evaluation QAA is now proposing a revision and restructuring of the existing Academic Infrastructure.

QAA proposes that, instead of consisting of the current four separate elements, the Academic Infrastructure should be restructured as a single Code of Practice for standards, quality and enhancement, incorporating all the elements of the existing Academic Infrastructure, supplemented by some brand new sections.

It is proposed that the new Code of Practice will be in two parts: Part A on Standards and Part B on Quality and enhancement. New chapters will cover learning and teaching, student support and student representation. There will also be the option to add a Part C on Information at a later stage.

MMU has engaged with each component of the Academic Infrastructure as these have been developed or revised. This engagement has been undertaken in a number of different ways in order to embed appropriately the recommendations for good practice within the University's quality management procedures.

The Institutional Audits of 2004 and 2009 together with the 2006 Collaborative Provision Audit reports noted that the University has embedded the Academic Infrastructure in a timely and comprehensive way into its management of quality and standards.

1.2 The role of QAA's Code of practice in the University's quality management

QAA's Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education is intended to help higher education institutions to meet their responsibilities for the assurance of academic standards and quality, by providing a framework within which they can consider the effectiveness of their individual approaches to a range of activities.

Each section of the Code of practice indicates the key issues that an HEI should consider in the respective areas of activity. The precepts encapsulate the matters that an HEI could reasonably be expected to address through its own quality assurance arrangements. The main principles identified in the Code of practice as underpinning good practice in assuring quality and standards in higher education are:

- A clear definition of responsibilities
- Consistent application of policies and practices that are underpinned by principles of fairness and equality of opportunity

- The availability of clear and accessible information
- The competence of staff
- Monitoring and review of policy, procedures and practices

In audit and review QAA does not ask a University about its adherence to the Code of practice on a precept by precept basis but it is expected to address the intentions of the precepts. Each section of the Code of practice has been prepared in consultation with the higher education sector and with the participation of key stakeholder groups. As such it represents a consensus of the providers and users of UK higher education. As it and other components of the Academic Infrastructure are reviewed, revised sections are published in consultative draft form with the invitation to HEIs to comment. At that point, the draft is circulated for comment and a response is approved by the Chair of the University's Academic Development Committee/ Quality Enhancement Sub-committee and submitted to QAA. When the confirmed text is published, the Centre for Academic Standards & Quality Enhancement (CASQE) is responsible for ensuring that a review of relevant procedures is undertaken to address the revision. Changes to procedures and/or key institutional documents go through an approval process, normally concluding with consideration by the Academic Development Committee and, where appropriate, formal approval by the Academic Board. Any consequent revisions to the University's main strategic or regulatory documents are also approved by the Academic Board.

1.3 The mapping of the University's engagement with each component of QAA's Academic Infrastructure

This document outlines the University's mapping process for ensuring full engagement with the Academic Infrastructure. It does not cover procedures for the review of their operational effectiveness.

The University uses the Academic Infrastructure as a guide to inform its quality management policies and procedures, which operate through a combination of management responsibility, officer activity and committee oversight. It has in place a systematic and regular process to consider the effectiveness of that engagement within the context of those policies and procedures. Following the restructuring of Academic Board committees in 2006 the Academic Development Committee (ADC) oversees that process through consideration of an annual update on engagement with the Academic Infrastructure submitted by the Head of Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement, noting any revisions and how these have been, or are being, addressed.

2. The Code of practice

Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes (revised 2004)

Engagement is addressed through the institutional code of practice and regulations for postgraduate research programmes. These were revised in 2005 to ensure compliance with the precepts in the second edition of Section 1 and most recently in 2008 following the report of the 2006 special review of research degree programmes. The most recent revisions of the code and regulations were approved by Academic Board in 2008. The Director of Research Enterprise and Development reports to the Registrar and Academic Board's Research Degrees Committee on the continuing effectiveness of the University's engagement and any proposals for revision.

Institutional Code of Practice and Regulations for Postgraduate Research Programmes of the University

http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/casqe/regulations/docs/research_regs.pdf

Section 2: Collaborative provision, flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning) (revised 2004)

Engagement is addressed through the University's standard quality management procedures supplemented by the institutional code of practice on collaborative provision and guidance on academic partnership, which are specified in the Academic Regulations and Procedures Handbook. The code draws on the revised Section 2 of the QAA's code, an internal review of the University's collaborative activities, and findings of the 2006 collaborative provision audit. Its most recent revision was approved by Academic Board in 2009, although it is currently under further revision. Section 2 of the Code also covers flexible and distributed learning (including e-Learning), which is addressed by separate guidelines on the development of e-learning approved by the Learning and Teaching Committee in 2006. The Head of the Collaborative Partnerships Office reports to the Registrar and ADC's Academic Standards Sub-Committee on the continuing effectiveness of the University's engagement and any proposals for revision.

Institutional Code of Practice for Placement and Work-based Learning

http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/casqe/regulations/docs/placement_icp.pdf

Section 3: Students with disabilities (Revised 2010)

Engagement is through a number of key documents. The University's Disability Statement was submitted to HEFCE June 2003. The precepts of Section 3 are addressed by University's Equal Opportunities Policy and Action Plan, launched in September 2001, following Academic Board and Board of Governors' approval. It also underpinned the development of the University's response to DDA Part IV. The resulting Framework for Implementation was distributed to all staff in April 2003 and was the main vehicle for working towards an accessible and inclusive learning experience. The Framework's most recent revision, in 2009, and renaming as The Framework for Supporting Disabled Students, complies with DDA legislation of 2005 and 2006, and addresses the precepts of the revised draft Code of practice: Section 3. The University's Revised Disability Equality Scheme and Action Plan for 2007-09 was approved and submitted to the Equality and Human Rights Commission in 2007. Compliance of the University's student policies and procedures with legislative requirements is monitored by the Equalities Impact Assessment Team (responsible to the Director of Human Resources). The University's Strategic Framework for Learning, Teaching and Assessment and its Equal Opportunities policy also specify undertakings, commitments and entitlements relating to the support for disabled students. In October 2010, the University introduced its revised Single Equality Scheme which brings together three existing duties on race, disability and gender and clearly defines the public sector duties that apply to higher education Institutions. This is supported by the Framework for Supporting Disabled Students at MMU. Specific matters relating to the assessment of students are contained within the University's Assessment Regulations. These are currently being revised and will be submitted for approval in 2011-12.

The Director of Student Services reports to the Registrar and ADC's Academic Standards Sub-committee on the continuing effectiveness of the University's engagement and any proposals for revision.

Single Equality Scheme

<http://www.mmu.ac.uk/humanresources/equalities/sesconsultation/single-equality-scheme-2010-13.pdf>

Framework for Supporting Disabled Students at MMU

http://www.celt.mmu.ac.uk/disability_guidelines/docs/Disability%20Framework%202010.pdf

Assessment Regulations: Appendix 4 Assessment Arrangements for Disabled Students

http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/casqe/regulations/assessment/docs/appendix_4_disabled_students.pdf

Section 4: External examining (revised 2004)

Engagement is addressed through the institutional code of practice on external examining. Following the publication of the second edition of Section 4, the most recent major revision of the institutional code of practice was approved by Academic Board in 2005, although it is reviewed annually. The Head of Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement reports to the Registrar and ADC's Academic Standards Sub-Committee on the continuing effectiveness of the University's engagement and any proposals for revision.

Institutional Code of Practice and Regulations for External Examining - Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduate Programmes of Study

http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/casqe/examiners/docs/EE_ICP.pdf

Section 5: Academic appeals and student complaints on academic matters (revised 2007)

In 2001 the Academic Board received a report from the Academic Registrar on the independent review of student complaints. The report included a revised student complaints procedure, drafted to address the first edition of the QAA Code of practice: Section 5, and UUK advice. Academic Board endorsed the student complaints procedure and recommended to the Board of Governors that it be approved with effect from the 2001/02 academic year. The University's review procedure (academic appeals) for taught programmes applies to both home based students and those studying under collaborative arrangements, and is contained within the assessment regulations for undergraduate and for taught postgraduate programmes of study, which are annually reviewed. The procedure for requesting a review of the decision of a Board of Examiners for postgraduate research students is contained within the institutional code of practice and regulations for postgraduate research programmes (see above). A revised edition of Section 5 was published in 2007 and the University has reviewed, and where necessary changed, its procedures both for academic appeals and student complaints for taught and research students to ensure full engagement. The University's revised Student Appeals and Complaints Procedures were approved for introduction in September 2009. The Director of Student Services reports to the Registrar and to ADC's Academic Standards Sub-committee on the continuing effectiveness of the University's engagement and any proposals for revision. The Director of Research, Enterprise and Development reports to the Registrar and Academic Board's Research Degrees Committee on the continuing effectiveness of engagement and any proposals for revision. The Assistant Director of Student Services (Student Administration) will submit an annual report on academic appeals to Academic Board.

Assessment Regulations: Appendix 8 Academic Appeals

http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/casqe/regulations/assessment/docs/appendix_8_appeals.pdf

Student Complaints Procedure

http://www.mmu.ac.uk/studenthandbook/Student_Regulations_Procedures.pdf

Section 6: Assessment of students (revised 2006)

Engagement is addressed through the University's regulatory framework, encompassing the Assessment Regulations for Undergraduate Programmes of Study and for Taught Postgraduate Programmes of Study and the Strategic Framework for Learning, Teaching and Assessment. The Regulations are reviewed annually, most recently in October and November 2010, and address the revised Code of practice: Section 6. The Head of Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement reports to the Registrar and ADC's Academic Standards Sub-committee on the continuing effectiveness of the University's engagement and any proposals for revision. Requests for exemption or variation from specific regulations, primarily to address PSRB requirements, are also considered by the Sub-committee. A full review of the University's assessment policies is currently in progress in order to support the introduction of the University's revised curriculum structures. This will ensure that all aspects of student assessment are addressed and that it fully aligns with the QAA Code of practice.

Assessment Regulations

http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/grad_regulations.php

Strategic Framework for Learning, Teaching and Assessment

<http://www.celt.mmu.ac.uk/ltstrategy/index.php>

Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review (revised 2006)

Engagement is addressed by the University's programme approval, review and monitoring (PARM) procedures, reviewed annually. The Head of Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement reports to the Registrar and ADC's Academic Standards Sub-Committee on the continuing effectiveness of the University's engagement and any proposals for revision. Updated PARM procedures were introduced in October 2010 for the approval of new programmes; periodic review of existing programmes; modification to programmes; and programme discontinuations.

Academic Regulations & Procedures Handbook

http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/quality_assurance.php

Section 8: Career education, information and guidance (Revised 2010)

Engagement is currently addressed by the University's Employability Curriculum Framework, approved by Academic Board in March 2010. The Director of Student Services reports to the Registrar and ADC's Academic Standards Sub-committee on the continuing effectiveness of the University's engagement and any proposals for revision.

Employability Curriculum Framework

<http://www.celt.mmu.ac.uk/employability/documents/Employability%20Curriculum%20Framework.pdf>

Section 9: Work-based and placement learning (revised 2007)

Engagement is addressed by the institutional code of practice for placement and work-based learning approved by the Academic Board in May 2009. The Director of Student Services reports to the Registrar and ADC's Academic Standards Sub-Committee on the continuing effectiveness of the University's engagement and any proposals for revision.

Institutional Code of Practice for Placement and Work-Based Learning

http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/casqe/regulations/docs/placement_icp.pdf

Section 10: Admissions to higher education (revised 2006)

Engagement is addressed by the University's Recruitment and Admissions Policy, the most recent version of which was approved by Academic Board in March 2011. See below (para 7) for engagement with the QAA Guidelines on the accreditation of prior learning. The Head of Recruitment and Admissions reports to the Registrar and ADC's Academic Standards Sub-Committee on the continuing effectiveness of the University's engagement and any proposals for revision.

Recruitment and Admissions Policy

See within: http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/academic_policy.php

3. The Framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ) (revised 2008) (including engagement with the Higher education credit framework for England)

Engagement is addressed by the full incorporation of the FHEQ into the University's award and credit framework through the Regulations for Academic Awards and the Assessment Regulations for Undergraduate and for Postgraduate Programmes of Study, with further supporting guidance in the Academic Regulations and Procedures Handbook. Each programme leading to an academic award of the University or to credit towards an award is required formally to comply with the FHEQ in any proposal for approval or review (Strategic Approval Form), and in its Programme Specification Regulations: Curriculum Design and Organisation). The University's award and credit framework also complies with the Higher education credit framework for England (2008) and with the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (2008).

Engagement with the FHEQ and with the Higher education credit framework is scrutinised as part of programme approval and periodic review, or in any programme modification proposal.

The Head of Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement reports to the Registrar and ADC's Academic Standards Sub-Committee the continuing effectiveness of the University's engagement and any proposals for revision.

4. Subject Benchmark Statements

(see also ARPH Section on Curriculum Design and the Undergraduate Curriculum Framework for the use of subject benchmark statements by programme teams)

Engagement is addressed by the requirement for each programme leading to an academic award of the University or to credit towards an award to formally address relevant subject benchmark statements in any proposal for approval or review (PAF/1 and PAF/2 proformas), and in their Programme Specification; Regulations: Curriculum Design and Organisation). Programmes must use relevant benchmark statements as described in the ARPH Section on Curriculum Design and the Undergraduate Curriculum Framework, which specifies that the statements are a reference point for those involved in the design, delivery and review of academic programmes. Guidance on programme design and development is provided by the Centre for Learning and Teaching. Engagement with relevant subject benchmark statements is scrutinised as part of programme approval and periodic review, or in any programme modification proposal.

The full text of all Subject Benchmark statements currently in approval may be consulted on the QAA website at:

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/default.asp>

Consultative draft statements are received by CASQE and distributed to faculties for comment. Those comments received are reported to the Academic Standards Sub-committee by CASQE and submitted to QAA.

New or revised Subject Benchmark Statements are received by CASQE, recorded by the Academic Standards Sub-committee as they are published and distributed to Faculties for action by relevant programme teams.

The Head of Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement is responsible for monitoring engagement with subject benchmark statements as part of the day to day operation of PARM procedures, reporting to the Registrar. ADC's Academic Standards Sub-Committee oversees the effectiveness of the operation of the procedures, receiving regular reports from the Head of CASQE.

5. Guidelines for Preparing Programme Specifications (revised 2006) *(see also ARPH Section: Programme documentation: programme specifications and programme student information)*

Engagement is addressed through the University's Programme Specification proforma (the PS/1 proforma), which fully addresses the QAA guidelines and provides a standard template covering basic programme details, programme aims and learning outcomes, structure, and learning and teaching and assessment strategies, admission requirements, interim and final awards, and PDP and student support arrangements. The proforma is accompanied by comprehensive guidance to direct and assist programme teams in its completion. The template and its use is monitored as part of the annual review of PARM procedures and reported to ADC by the Head of CASQE.

Each programme leading to an academic award of the University or to credit towards an award is required to complete a Programme Specification, following the University template to ensure compliance with the FHEQ and relevant Subject Benchmarking Statements. Programme Specifications are subject to scrutiny as part of programme approval and periodic review. All Programme Specifications are available online and form part of the student Diploma Supplement. The Head of Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement is responsible for monitoring programme specifications as part of the day to day operation of PARM procedures, reporting to the Registrar. ADC's Academic Standards Sub-Committee oversees the effectiveness of the operation of the procedures, receiving regular reports from the Head of CASQE.

6. Personal Development Planning: guidance for institutional policy and practice in higher education (2009)

Engagement is addressed through the implementation of University schemes which address the QAA definition of personal development planning: a structured and supported process undertaken by a learner to reflect upon their own learning, performance and/or achievement and to plan for their personal, educational and career development.

- **A transcript**

This is a record of a student's learning and achievement. It includes details of the units taken throughout a programme. Engagement is through standard transcripts introduced by the then Academic Registry in 2003. As a single University assessment database is introduced progressively from 2008/09, the European Diploma Supplement will be issued on request to every student achieving a final or interim award from the University, whether home based or studying under collaborative arrangements. In the future, records of students' learning and achievement will be extended in accordance with the proposed Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR).

- **Personal and Development Planning (PDP)**

This is a structured and supported process, which helps a student think about his/her own learning and achievement and plan for education and career development. It includes a student's personal development records. After the evaluation of several pilots, schemes were introduced in each faculty from 2005/06, based on the principles of the QAA's 2001 Guidelines. In 2005 the Academic Board approved the Learning and Teaching Committee's recommendation that PDP should be embedded within the Programme Specification and reviewed as part of the PARM process. It is also included in the Programme Log. The Director of Student Services reports to the Registrar and ADC's Academic Standards Sub-Committee on the continuing effectiveness of the University's engagement and any proposals for revision.

7. Guidelines on the accreditation of prior learning (2004)

Engagement is addressed by the University's scheme for the admission of students with Advanced Standing following the accreditation of prior learning, which addresses QAA guidelines, approved by Academic Board in June 2005. The Director of Recruitment and Admissions reports to the Registrar and to ADC's Academic Standards Sub-Committee on the continuing effectiveness of the University's engagement and any proposals for revision.

8. Further published QAA statements

(i) Thematic enquiries into concerns about academic quality and standards in higher education in England

The work has focused on five areas:

- a. student workload and contact hours
(addressed via the Undergraduate Curriculum Framework)
- b. English language requirements for international students
(Addressed via the Recruitment and Admissions Policy)
- c. recruitment practices for international students
(Addressed via the Recruitment and Admissions Policy)
- d. the use of external examiners
(addressed via the revised ICP on External Examining)
- e. assessment practices
(addressed through the Strategic Framework For Learning, Teaching and Assessment)..

(ii) QAA approaches to student engagement

Considered in the development of the Student Voice Policy

(iii) Quality assurance and the HEFCE priority for higher education learning linked to employer engagement and workforce development

Considered in the development of the Professional Development Programme/ OPP project

9. QAA Institutional Review

In September 2011 QAA will launch a new process for reviewing academic quality and standards in higher education institutions in England and Northern Ireland. The process is called Institutional review and replaces the current method, Institutional audit.

The aim of Institutional review is to safeguard quality and standards in higher education in England and Northern Ireland; to help improve students' experience of higher education; and to allow us to look into public concerns about quality and standards in higher education quickly and efficiently. The new process is characterised by an intention to place current and prospective students' interests at its heart, with a commitment to clear communication with the general public.

Institutional review is a peer review process. All team members have current or recent experience of academic management and quality assurance in UK higher education, and every team includes a student reviewer. The team looks at information provided by both the institution and its students, and makes judgments on:

- the institution's threshold academic standards
- the quality of students' learning opportunities (teaching and academic support)
- from 2012-13, the quality of public information, including that produced for students and applicants
- the institution's enhancement of students' learning opportunities.

Each higher education institution in England and Northern Ireland will take part in Institutional review approximately once every six years. Reports for each institution will be published on the QAA website.