

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK

INTRODUCTION

The University's framework for quality assurance underpins our commitment to academic excellence. It acknowledges the importance of an integrated approach across all levels including central teams in Education Services such as the **Education Quality and Policy Office (EQPO)** and **Postgraduate Research Office (PGRO)**, Faculties, Departments, and Schools.

This document sets out the General Board's expectations to ensure Faculties and Departments are empowered and clear on their responsibilities in taking the lead in academic matters including the design, implementation and day-to-day running of their courses. Teams within Education Services can provide support and guidance. The governance arrangements of the General Board and its Education Committee and sub committees seek to support and facilitate this academic-led approach.

This document summarises the key bodies responsible for quality assurance and sets out the University's approach to quality and standards, including an overview of key QA processes.

PRINCIPLES

The University's mission is "to contribute to society through the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence". This is reflected in one of its core values, which is to provide quality and depth of provision across all subjects. The University's quality assurance procedures provide a framework within which its institutions can examine and enhance their education to enable them to achieve this aspiration of excellence.

The University is accountable for the quality and standards of its provision, and procedures for assuring quality in teaching, learning and assessment are designed to reflect:

- the University's mission
- the complex, diverse and devolved nature of the University
- the close inter-relationship between teaching, scholarship and research
- education which enhances the ability of students to learn throughout life
- the collegiate nature of the University
- a proportionate approach to the management of potential risk to learning and teaching provision and to assessment
- The University's commitment to equity of experience and outcome for all students

KEY INSTITUTIONAL BODIES

University Council (UC)

The Council is the principal executive and policy making body with overall responsibility for the administration of the University.

General Board (GB)

The General Board is responsible to the Council and the Regent House for matters relating to the University's academic and educational activities and policies. The University is accountable for the quality and standards of its provision and is required to comply with Conditions of Registration set out by the Office for Students as well as participating in the activities of various Professional,

Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (also called accrediting bodies). The University will seek to comply with regulatory requirements and will give due consideration to the expectations of other external sector bodies, whilst ensuring that the University's quality assurance procedures are appropriate primarily for its teaching, learning and assessment activities, rather than being driven by external quality regimes.

Governance and Compliance Division (GCD)

The Governance and Compliance Division is responsible for monitoring the University's financial, operational and governance arrangements and ensures all policies are approved by the relevant University Committees, and where appropriate have had input from the **Legal Services Division** and the **University Draftsman**.

Faculties and Departments

Faculties and Departments are responsible for day-to-day course management: subject experts are best placed to provide the detailed academic scrutiny required of a robust quality assurance system. Faculty Boards and their equivalents are responsible to the General Board for *ensuring the provision of appropriate instruction and adequate facilities for research in the subjects of the Faculty, for preparing the teaching programme of the Faculty, and for ensuring that the teaching given is of a high standard* (Statutes and Ordinances, Chap. IX, pg. 610). Degree Committees report quality assurance (particularly pertaining to new courses) and other issues through Faculty Boards.

Schools

Whilst ongoing quality assurance of undergraduate and postgraduate courses is primarily the responsibility of Faculties and Departments (and the Institute for Continuing Education (ICE)), the six Schools support the work of GBEC in representing the views of their institutions and in supporting an approach which is consistent with General Board expectations to ensure equity of opportunity for all students. Schools are required to approve the business case for new courses, confirming that they can be delivered at the appropriate standard.

Colleges

Cambridge colleges play a key role in the University's educational offer for undergraduate students through small group teaching in supervisions. The quality and effectiveness of this teaching is monitored in each College by the Senior Tutor and relevant College committees. Faculty Boards work closely with Directors of Studies to ensure that University and college teaching are coordinated and complementary. Directors of Studies Groups act as a crucial link between Faculties and Departments and colleges. DoSs are responsible for arranging supervisions with suitably qualified supervisors, seeking and acting on feedback on supervisor performance where necessary.

EDUCATION SERVICES

Education Quality and Policy Office (EQPO)

EQPO is responsible for the implementation of such quality assurance and enhancement policies related to taught courses as are set out by the General Board, and for monitoring their use at Faculty and Departmental level. EQPO offers advice and guidance to Faculties and Departments about approval processes for new courses and major and minor course modifications; conducts Education and Monitoring Reviews; scrutinises external examiner reports; oversees the production and amendment of programme specifications and maintains up to date knowledge of external regulatory requirements. EQPO members regularly contribute to diverse University-wide projects with an emphasis on quality assurance.

Postgraduate Research Office (PGRO)

Similarly, PGRO manages quality assurance processes and related policies for all postgraduate research courses (PhD and MPhil by Thesis), including course approvals, modifications, review, and monitoring. PGRO provides expert advice and guidance on external regulatory requirements and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) terms and conditions.

Other teams that support education and quality assurance are:

The Cambridge Centre for Teaching and Learning (CCTL)

The Cambridge Centre for Teaching and Learning works with staff to enrich educational practice; encourages innovation and the exchange of ideas and methods; and is a focus for supporting enhancement initiatives within the Collegiate University.

The Blended Learning Service (BLS)

BLS assists staff in the design and delivery of excellent teaching and learning, particularly supporting development of blended educational experiences. It provides staff with the support of a team of dedicated experts, aligning their work with institutional policies and academic needs, and access to additional time and capacity to develop high-quality blended education resources, process, and practice.

The Careers Service

The Careers Service supports both students and alumni by providing them with professional, impartial career education, advice, and guidance. Service users are actively encouraged to reflect on the knowledge and skills they have acquired through their academic pursuits and co-curricular activities. This reflection serves as a foundation for making informed decisions regarding their future steps, whether it entails pursuing further studies or entering the labour market. The Careers Service is also able to advise those proposing new courses on likely destinations on completion.

Recruitment and Marketing

The Student Recruitment and Marketing team works with departments and Colleges to advertise and promote Cambridge courses. This includes ensuring information is correct and clear for applicants, as well as conducting market research with prospective and current students. All information is collated and checked to ensure compliance with Competition and Markets Authority regulations.

KEY CENTRAL COMMITTEES

General Board's Education Committee (GBEC)

GBEC has strategic oversight and responsibility for internal quality assurance and adherence to standards imposed by external regulatory bodies such as the **Office for Students (OfS)** and (where relevant) **Ofsted**, and good practice from national bodies such as the **Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)**, **Advance HE** and the **Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)**.

Responsibility for detailed consideration of these specific areas of GBEC's remit is delegated to sub-committees:

Academic Standards and Enhancement Committee (ASEC)

ASEC considers all quality assurance matters arising from GBEC's terms of reference relating to taught courses. It is responsible for approving new course proposals and substantial changes in existing courses; and evaluating first year reviews of new programmes. It has general oversight of the quality of taught education and learning opportunities offered to students.

Postgraduate Committee (PC)

PC considers quality assurance matters arising from GBEC's terms of reference relating to research courses. It is responsible for approving new course proposals and substantial changes in existing courses. It has general oversight of the quality of research courses and research training opportunities offered to students.

KEY QUALITY PROCESSES

Approval of All New Courses

Proposals for new taught courses leading to a University qualification or award for inclusion in the [Statutes and Ordinances](#), must be formally approved by **ASEC**. Similarly, proposals for new research courses must be formally approved by **PC**. Proposals for 1+3 programmes involving both taught and research elements may need approval from both Committees.

Faculties and Departments are required to provide a clear rationale, educational aims and learning outcomes, as well as specific evidence of consultation with external academic experts, current students and (for matriculated undergraduate courses) with Colleges (via existing Directors of Studies and/or the Senior Tutors' Education Committee in the first instance). The relevant School(s) approve the business case, confirming that the course can be delivered at the appropriate standard, and ensures the course aligns with its long-term strategic plans, including numbers planning.

Approval of Minor and Major Modification of All Current Courses

The need to make changes to existing courses arises through the ongoing review, management, and enhancement of educational provision. Very minor modifications can be approved by EQPO or PGRO via delegated authority, other changes are considered by ASEC or PC, and sometimes by GBEC. Again, Faculties and Departments are required to provide clear reasons for any change and to consider the implications for current and potential students, including, with guidance from EQPO or PC, any implications for compliance with consumer law.

Education Monitoring and Review

Education Monitoring and Review (EMR) is a quality assurance process which uses student outcome and other data to monitor the effectiveness of the University's courses. It is applied to all award-bearing courses, including Triposes, Master's and doctoral courses, as well as all courses listed as "non-member awards" in Statutes and Ordinances.

The EMR encourages Faculties and Departments to reflect on all educational aspects of the course and identify areas for improvement or further consideration. Issues and concerns identified through EMR may be reported to ASEC or PC and GBEC if appropriate, and the expectation is that they will be addressed by the relevant Faculty (or Department) Board, with support from EQPO and PGRO colleagues. EQPO and ASEC/PC will monitor progress and follow-up if necessary.

External Examiners (Taught Programmes)

External Examiners play a key role in the ongoing monitoring and review of courses by providing independent and impartial advice and comments on academic standards and consideration of assessment processes, ensuring they remain rigorous and fair. They also act as comparators of academic standards across the sector. The expectation is that any concerns expressed by external examiners will be addressed by Faculty (or Department) Boards. EQPO liaison officers can offer guidance and support and ASEC will monitor progress and follow-up if necessary. Serious concerns will be reported to and monitored by GBEC.

Programme Specifications (Taught Programmes)

A definitive record of each programme and qualification is maintained by the University to act as a reference point for the delivery, assessment, monitoring and review of the programme. Our programme specifications are accessible to academic and professional services staff, students, internal and external examiners, professional and statutory bodies, and academic reviewers. Programme specifications include information on educational aims, intended learning outcomes, learning and teaching methods and modes of assessment, and are updated as and when amendments to the programme or learning outcomes are approved.

Statutes and Ordinances (All Courses)

The *Statutes and Ordinances* provide the constitutional framework that allows the University to govern its affairs. These regulations provide the definitive record of examination and assessment formats of all taught courses, and amendments may only be made through the course modification process with due academic rigour and consideration.

EXTERNAL REGULATORS

Office for Students (OfS)

The OfS is an independent body that acts as the regulator and competition authority for the higher education sector in England; it reports to Parliament through the Department for Education. To stay registered with the OfS, the quality and standards of a higher education provider's courses must meet a [minimum set of requirements or conditions](#) including the provision of 'a high quality academic experience' to students.

Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA)

The OIA is an independent body responsible for reviewing student complaints about higher education providers in England and Wales after internal complaints procedures have been exhausted. The OIA issues good practice guidance to set out their expectations of the sector, and can make recommendations for change by individual HEIs

Competition and Markets Authority (CMA)

The CMA is the UK's competition regulator which provides advice on complying with consumer protection law as it [applies to higher education](#).

Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs)

PSRBs are a diverse group of professional and employer bodies, regulators, and those with statutory authority over a profession or group of professionals. Accreditation usually entails an inspection of provision and/or scrutiny of course documentation; Faculties and Departments manage these processes and engagement with PSRBs, and GBEC monitors action in response to recommendations arising from inspection reports.

Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted)

Ofsted is a non-ministerial government department that regulates teaching training and apprenticeship provision (amongst other things). The Faculty of Education and the Institute of Continuing Education undergo regular Ofsted inspections to ensure standards of their provision are being met.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Representation

The General Board expects student representation at all levels of the formal committee structure to give the fullest opportunity for students to raise matters of concern at an appropriate level. Student Union Sabbatical Officers sit on the central committees relating to teaching and learning (GBEC, ASEC and PC), whilst it is the expectation that student representatives chosen or elected to represent their fellow students participate in decision-making processes at the local level. Student views should be sought on all aspects of the student experience and student feedback is welcomed, considered, and used to shape future development.

Feedback

Student feedback should be sought via internal means, including surveys and feedback mechanisms whereby student views are recorded and used to contribute to the cycle of continuous improvement; feedback is also garnered through external mechanisms such as the National Student Survey (NSS), Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) and Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES).

Faculties and Departments are expected to ask students for feedback on a regular basis. This can be via student representative on committees, town hall meetings, staff-student committees and course-specific surveys. Feedback relating to quality of education should be addressed by Faculty (or Department) Boards. Closing the loop is an essential part of this process – information on how student feedback is dealt with and resolved should be made available to them.

Student Consultation Framework

A [Student Consultation Framework](#) approved by GBEC provides guidance to ensure productive student participation in decision-making across the University. It outlines the minimum expectation of consultation to be undertaken when making decisions or leading projects that have a direct impact on the student experience, and provides a breakdown of recommended consultative steps, including methods of engaging with and communicating outcomes to students.

CCTL's [Students as Partners](#) guide aims to support staff in working with students as partners for research or educational enhancement projects. It briefly introduces the concept, and some ways of understanding students-as-partners work and how this might manifest in practical terms.

University-wide Surveys

The University participates in a number of nationally benchmarked surveys, in order to encourage positive changes to its provision and to continually enhance the student experience. Any concerns identified through survey results are referred to the relevant Schools, Departments or Faculties, and subsequently to the appropriate General Board Committee (with student representation), for consideration. In addition to national surveys, students are surveyed by their course or Department, to obtain a full picture of their experience.