

ACADEMIC QUALITY HANDBOOK

SECTION 3

THE ASSURANCE AND ENHANCEMENT OF ACADEMIC QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

(Incorporating Internal Teaching Review Procedures)

This Section of the Academic Quality Handbook should be of interest to all academic staff, and of particular interest to Heads of School, Course and Programme Co-ordinators, and members of relevant School and University Committees.

CONTENTS

	page
3.1 Responsibility for Academic Standards and Quality Assurance	3-4
Quality and Standards in UK Higher Education	3-4
The Senatus Academicus	3-4
Schools	3-4
University Systems	3-4
Officers	3-5
3.2 Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee Structure	3-6
3.3 Course and Programme Design, Approval, Validation and Review	3-7
Course and Programme Proposal Forms	3-7
Design and Initial Approval of Courses and Programmes	3-8
<i>Responsibility</i>	3-8
<i>Rationale and Requirements</i>	3-9
<i>Level</i>	3-9
<i>Progression</i>	3-9
<i>Balance</i>	3-9
<i>Flexibility</i>	3-9
<i>Coherence</i>	3-9
<i>Integrity</i>	3-10
<i>Joint and Major/Minor Programmes</i>	3-10
<i>Points of Reference</i>	3-10
<i>Progress Files/Transcripts/European Diploma Supplement/ Personal Development and Planning</i>	3-10
School Approval	3-11
College Approval, Central Validation and The Planning Cycle	3-11
Course and Programme Review and Re-Validation	3-12
3.4 The University's Policy in regard to Academic Standards	3-13
The Definition of, and Responsibility for, Academic Standards	3-13
The Maintenance, Verification and Monitoring of Academic Standards	3-14
The Review of Academic Standards	3-16

3.5	Quality Control Mechanisms	3-16
	Course Review	3-16
	<i>Student Course Evaluation Form</i>	3-17
	<i>Staff: Student Liaison Committees</i>	3-17
	<i>External Examiners' Reports</i>	3-18
	Programme Review	3-19
	Other Forms of Feedback	3-19
	Internal Teaching Reviews	3-20
	Audit Files	3-21
3.6	Quality Enhancement	3-22
	Educational Development and Innovation in Teaching and Learning	3-22
	<i>A brief history of Educational Development at the University of Aberdeen</i>	3-22
	Learning Technology Unit	3-22
	C&IT Skills and Information Skills	3-23
	Provisions for Students with Disabilities and Medical Conditions	3-23
	Learning from Internal and External Reports and Publications	3-24
	<i>Course and Programme Review</i>	3-24
	<i>Internal Teaching Review</i>	3-25
	<i>External Accreditation</i>	3-25
	<i>Enhancement-led Institutional Review</i>	3-25
	<i>External Reference Points</i>	3-26
	University Committee on Teaching and Learning	3-27
	Quality Enhancement Strategy	3-27
3.7	Staff Recruitment and Development	3-28
	Appointment Procedures	3-29
	Initial Development of Staff	3-29
	<i>Introduction to Learning and Teaching in Higher Education course</i>	3-29
	<i>Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Teaching</i>	3-29
	<i>Postgraduate Demonstrators</i>	3-29
	<i>Programme of courses for postgraduate demonstrators, teaching assistants, postdoctoral and contract research staff with occasional teaching duties</i>	3-30
	<i>Bespoke Development</i>	3-30
	<i>Open programme of courses</i>	3-30
	<i>Bespoke Delivery</i>	3-30
	<i>Projects and ongoing development</i>	3-30
	Continuous Professional Development and Performance Evaluation	3-30
	Appraisal and Promotion Procedures	3-31
	Relief Teaching	3-31

Appendices

Appendix 3.1:	Organisational Chart including Committees concerned with Quality Assurance and Enhancement
Appendix 3.2:	University Committee on Teaching and Learning (UCTL): <i>Remit and Composition</i>
Appendix 3.3:	Academic Standards Committees (ASC): <i>Remit and Composition (including Directors of Undergraduate Programmes and College Postgraduate Officers)</i>
Appendix 3.4:	Students' Progress Committees: <i>Remit and Composition</i>
Appendix 3.5:	Student Recruitment and Admissions Committee (SRAC): <i>Remit and Composition</i>
Appendix 3.6:	Planning Cycle for Validation of Courses, Programmes of Study, and Changes to Regulations
Appendix 3.7a:	Course Review : <i>Notes for Guidance of Course Co-ordinators, Heads of School, College Directors of Teaching & Learning and Members of Academic Standards Committees</i>
Appendix 3.7b:	Postgraduate Review : Taught Courses and Programmes: <i>Notes for Guidance of Course and Programme Co-ordinators, Heads of School and Members of the Academic Standards Committee (Postgraduate)</i>

- Appendix 3.8: Internal Teaching Review : *Information for those preparing for Internal Teaching Review*
- Annex A to 3.8: Internal Teaching Review : *Self-Evaluation Document*
- Annex B to 3.8: Internal Teaching Review : *Programme Review Report*
- Annex C to 3.8: Internal Teaching Review : *Postgraduate Research Student Training and Supervision Report Form*
- Annex D to 3.8: Internal Teaching Review: *Schedule*
- Appendix 3.9: Internal Teaching Review : *Guidance Notes for Staff invited to meet Visiting Panels*
- Appendix 3.10: Internal Teaching Review : *An Introduction for Students*
- Appendix 3.11: Internal Teaching Review : *Information for Panel Members and Clerks*
- Appendix 3.12: Policy on Communication and Information Technology Skills
- Appendix 3.13: Quality Enhancement Strategy

3.1 Responsibility for Academic Standards and Quality Assurance

Quality and Standards in UK Higher Education

- 3.1.1 It has long been acknowledged, by the Government, by higher education agencies, and by institutions themselves, that the responsibility for the assurance of the quality of higher education provision and the standards of awards must rest with the institutions. Section 2 of the Academic Quality Handbook provides an overview of the various frameworks for quality assurance in higher education since 1991.

The Senatus Academicus

- 3.1.2 The Senatus Academicus (the Senate) is charged with the regulation and superintendence of the teaching and discipline of the University, and with the promotion of research. The Senate is responsible to the University Court for ensuring that satisfactory policies and procedures are in place for safeguarding the academic standards of the University's awards, and for the assurance, maintenance and enhancement of the quality of the University's educational provision. Periodic external peer review monitors the University's success in this regard (Section 2 refers).

Schools

- 3.1.3 In view of the diverse range of courses and programmes of study offered, the University has accepted that, generally, the "ownership" of these should reside firmly with Schools, which are best placed to provide the detailed academic scrutiny required in a robust quality assurance system.
- 3.1.4 The quality of the University's teaching and learning activities is safeguarded through the professional standards of the teaching and support staff. These are maintained and enhanced through the University's policies in relation to staff recruitment and development (sub-section 3.7 refers).

University Systems

- 3.1.5 The University's mechanisms for the assurance and enhancement of quality and the safeguarding of academic standards centre around the audit of School management of its teaching and learning provision and of a School's implementation of University policies and procedures. These mechanisms are supervised by a central quality assurance and enhancement committee structure which the Senate introduced in September 1996. Details of this structure are given in sub-section 3.2.
- 3.1.6 **In summary**, the Senate has devolved responsibility to the University Committee on Teaching and Learning to undertake the detailed consideration and development of teaching and learning policy and to make appropriate recommendations to the Senate. Academic Standards Committees (ASC), which are University committees, oversee the validation and re-validation of course and programme proposals and are responsible, *inter alia*, for the regulation of students' studies and the provision of arrangements for student academic support. The Student Recruitment and Admissions Committee oversees all aspects of recruitment and admissions, at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. Quality Enhancement is overseen by the Quality Enhancement Strategy Team which is a formal sub-committee of the University Committee on Teaching and Learning.

Officers

- 3.1.7 Several senior academic staff and Officers have particular responsibility for quality assurance in respect of ensuring that the University's quality control procedures are undertaken effectively and, where appropriate, promote the enhancement of quality. Many of these also serve on various University committees which have a quality assurance function.
- 3.1.8 The **Vice-Principal** (Teaching and Learning) has overall institutional responsibility for quality assurance and enhancement and for wider access and participation. The remit of this post includes convening the University Committee on Teaching and Learning (UCTL) and the Quality Enhancement Strategy Team (QUEST).
- 3.1.9 The establishment of Colleges in August 2003 gave the opportunity for the creation of a new teaching and learning infrastructure to improve our management of quality assurance and enhancement at College and School levels. **Heads of College** have overall responsibility for the quality assurance and enhancement of teaching and learning provision in their College. In practice, their responsibility is devolved to the **College Directors of Teaching and Learning** who convene the College Teaching and Learning Committees. They are members of the UCTL and QUEST. Administrative support is provided by the **Assistant College Registrars (Teaching and Learning)**.
- 3.1.10 **Heads of School** have a quality assurance and enhancement function at the School level in ensuring that a School implements the University's, and its own, quality control procedures satisfactorily. In many cases, responsibility for teaching and learning is delegated by the Head of School to a **School Director of Teaching and Learning** (or equivalent).
- 3.1.11 The **ASC Conveners** fulfil an important quality assurance function on a day-to-day basis on behalf of the various quality assurance committees. All members of ASCs are appointed by the Senate on the recommendation of the relevant Head of College(s), after appropriate consultation.
- 3.1.12 The **Directors of Undergraduate Programmes** for each Area of Study are appointed by the Senate on the recommendation of the relevant Head(s) of College, after appropriate consultation. They have extensive delegated authority to undertake a range of duties on behalf of the Academic Standards Committee (Undergraduate), as listed in Appendix 3.3.
- 3.1.13 **Advisers of Studies** are appointed by the University Court on the recommendation of relevant Heads of College after consultation with the relevant Head of School. All students (except MBChB students) are allocated an Adviser of Studies each year and are required to meet with their Adviser at the beginning of each academic year. Students are not allowed to register for an academic year unless their Adviser has approved the programme they wish to take and has signed their Registration Document. Subsequent changes of curriculum must be authorised by the Adviser. A detailed Job Description for Advisers of Studies is to be found in Section 5, Appendix 5.1. A number of **Senior Advisers** are also appointed, normally one per School to provide support to Advisers of Studies within their School. Meetings of Senior Advisers are held to provide feedback from Advisers and to help inform developments in the Advising System.

- 3.1.14 **Admissions Selectors** are appointed at undergraduate level to consider applications and make offers on behalf of the University for admission to the degrees that they are assigned. The Student Recruitment and Admissions Committee nominates Admissions Selectors for appointment, as deemed appropriate, to the University Court, on the recommendation of relevant Heads of College after appropriate consultation.
- 3.1.15 **Directors of Studies (Admissions)** are appointed in some areas to oversee the work of the Admissions Selectors for the degrees assigned to an Area of Study: they are appointed on the recommendation of relevant Heads of College after appropriate consultation.
- 3.1.16 **College Postgraduate Officers** are appointed on the recommendation of relevant Heads of College after appropriate consultation, with at least two being appointed from each of the University's Areas of Study. They have extensive delegated authority to undertake a range of duties on behalf of the Academic Standards Committee (Postgraduate), as listed in Appendix 3.3.

3.2 Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee Structure

- 3.2.1 An *Organisational Chart* of the University's *Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee Structure* is provided in Appendix 3.1. The formal remits and compositions of the major committees are provided in Appendices 3.2-3.5. These are also available on the University's web-site¹, **which includes the names of the Conveners and Registry Officers**, and contact details for the latter. The remits are summarised below.
- 3.2.2 The **University Committee on Teaching and Learning** [Appendix 3.2 refers] is responsible to the Senate for the assurance of the quality of the University's educational provision, particularly in relation to the design, implementation, evaluation and review of mechanisms for quality assurance and quality control, for the enhancement of the quality of teaching and learning, and for the safeguarding of academic standards. The Committee is therefore the primary forum for the discussion and formulation of policy and procedures in relation to the assurance of academic quality and standards, and recommends policy to the Senate for approval, as appropriate. To inform debate at UCTL, meetings of Heads of School are held two weeks before each meeting.
- 3.2.3 The **Academic Standards Committee (Undergraduate)** (ASC) [Appendix 3.3 refers] is responsible for monitoring the courses and programmes of study assigned to them. This includes the consideration of proposals for new undergraduate courses and programmes in consultation with College Teaching & Learning Committees (paragraph 3.3.26 refers), and the provision of appropriate mechanisms for student guidance and learner support. The ASC is a robust quality assurance committee, with members serving a University rather than a School role. There are three **Students' Progress Committees** [Appendix 3.4 refers]: a composite one for the areas of Arts & Social Sciences, Divinity, Education, Law and Science, and separate Committees in the areas of Engineering and Medicine. These Committees, which are sub-committees of the ASC, consider the cases of students who fail to satisfy the progress requirements for a particular degree as prescribed by the Regulations.

¹ <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/admin/cttelist.hti>

- 3.2.4 The **Academic Standards Committee (Postgraduate)** [Appendix 3.3] is responsible to the Senate for the monitoring and administration of all postgraduate courses and programmes of study (taught and research) and associated regulations; monitoring the progress of individual postgraduate students; and the formulation and implementation of postgraduate policy in the University.
- 3.2.5 The **Quality Enhancement Strategy Team (QUEST)** is responsible for developing, overseeing the implementation of and keeping under review the institution's Quality Enhancement Strategy (Appendix 3.13 refers).
- 3.2.6 All aspects of recruitment and admissions (both undergraduate and postgraduate) are overseen by the **Student Recruitment and Admissions Committee**, which has a clear remit to incorporate recruitment and marketing strategies [Appendix 3.5 refers].
- 3.2.7 Since 1999/2000, a system of annual reports has provided an opportunity for the Senate and the University Committee on Teaching and Learning (UCTL) to exercise their overall responsibilities for quality and standards. The UCTL prepares an annual report for consideration by the Senate in January: the report briefly summarises the major activities undertaken by the UCTL in the previous academic year and outlines the main areas of work for the forthcoming year. The report to the Senate also incorporates analysis of data relating to academic appeals, complaints, discipline and students' progress for the previous year.
- 3.2.8 In addition, the unconfirmed Minutes of the above committees are placed on the web⁴ once they have been approved by the Convener. Heads of School are informed, normally by e-mail, of specific issues that require their response or action following each meeting.

3.3 Course and Programme Design, Approval, Validation and Review

Course and Programme Proposal Forms

- 3.3.1 The University Committee on Teaching and Learning (UCTL) has approved a series of forms for the submission of course and programme proposals. These are listed below, and are available through the University's Web pages² for downloading as Word for Windows documents:-

SENAS1 - Proposal to Offer a **New Course**

SENAS2 - Proposal to Offer a **New Programme of Study**

SENAS3 - Proposals for **Changes to Courses or Programmes**

SENAS4 - Proposal to **Withdraw a Course or Programme of Study**

- 3.3.2 The new course proposal form (SENAS1) requires the course **aims** and main **learning outcomes** to be identified, as well as requiring details in relation to teaching, and assessment arrangements.

² <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/registry/senas.hti>

3.3.3 The forms are continually reviewed by the University Committee on Teaching and Learning (UCTL), and any comments should be sent to the Clerk to the UCTL via the Senate Office (E-mail: senoff@abdn.ac.uk). The forms were extensively revised in the summer of 2000 to take account of the QAA's procedures for Subject Review (which required the submission of Programme Specifications) and sections of the QAA's Code of Practice for the Assurance of Academic Quality and Standards in Higher Education (in particular, the sections on Students with Disabilities and on Programme Approval, Monitoring and Review) and subsequently in October 2003 following the establishment of Colleges. The latter review led to the length of the senas forms being substantially reduced, largely due to removal of information previously required for external Subject Review (which ceased in 2002). And, the requirement for the inclusion of a Programme Specification (and Curriculum Map) was also removed. At the time of writing, the University was exploring the development of more student-friendly Programme Specifications which it was planned would be largely web-based.

3.3.4 **Guidance Notes on completion of the forms and on how to write aims and learning outcomes** are available at www.abdn.ac.uk/registry/senas.hti

Design and Initial Approval of Courses and Programmes

[Note: Paragraphs 3.3.7-3.3.18 are adapted from, and should be read in conjunction with, the QAA's Code of Practice for Programme Approval, Monitoring and Review which is available at: www.qaa.ac.uk]

Responsibility

3.3.5 Responsibility for the design and initial approval of programmes and courses resides with Schools.

3.3.6 Each programme must be sponsored by a School (or two or more Schools in the case of joint and inter-disciplinary programmes³). The majority of programmes (e.g. most single honours and postgraduate taught programmes) will be the responsibility of a single Programme Co-ordinator. For inter-disciplinary programmes, at least one Programme Co-ordinator must be identified from one of the sponsoring Schools. For joint Honours programmes, each School should identify a Programme Co-ordinator to be responsible for its component of all such programmes.

3.3.7 All courses are the responsibility of the parent School, and a single Course Co-ordinator should be appointed from the relevant School.

3.3.8 Programme and Course Co-ordinators must be either members of the full-time academic staff or an Honorary member of the academic staff of the relevant School: this does not preclude "bought-in" (including relief) teachers from having a major role in organising and delivering a course (but not a programme).

³ A small number of exceptions exist at undergraduate level in that some inter-disciplinary programmes are not related to any specific Subject Group (as defined by the QAA) and lead to awards governed by the University's Regulations. Examples are some non-honours degrees. These programmes are therefore overseen by the relevant Undergraduate Programme Committee.

Rationale and Requirements

3.3.9 There may be several reasons why a School wishes to design a new course or programme: e.g. as a consequence of feedback from staff, students, External Examiners or other external bodies/agencies, or changes in market demands. All proposals must have regard to relevant external inputs, including national subject benchmark statements and/or the requirements of professional and statutory bodies, where applicable. All proposals for new courses and programmes must therefore be submitted on the appropriate forms (paragraph 3.3.1 refers), which have been designed to assist Schools in ensuring that all relevant information is provided for the validation committee (ASC).

3.3.10 The following (extracted from the QAA's *Code of Practice for Programme Approval, Monitoring and Review*) should be incorporated into the design and approval of programmes and their constituents courses, to ensure that standards are set appropriately and intended learning outcomes specified accordingly:-

Level

3.3.11 Consideration should be given to the level of a programme and to the level of the stated learning outcomes at any named stages in the programme. A **level is an indicator of the relative demand, complexity, depth of study and learner autonomy** involved in a programme.

Progression

3.3.12 Consideration should be given to the way in which the curriculum promotes an organised progression so that the demands on the learner in intellectual challenge, skills, knowledge, and learning autonomy increase.

Balance

3.3.13 Consideration should be given to the balance within the programme of a number of elements, typically academic and practical elements, a concern for personal development and academic outcomes and a determination of breadth and depth of the subject material to be included in the programme.

Flexibility

3.3.14 The range of requirements of learners likely to enter the programme should be considered.

Coherence

3.3.15 Consideration should be given to the overall coherence and intellectual integrity of the programme. The programme should be designed in a way that will ensure the student's experience has a logic and integrity that are clearly linked to the purpose of the programme.

Integrity

- 3.3.16 The expectations given to students and others about the intended outcomes of the programme should be unambiguous and deliverable. Consideration should be given to the feasibility of attainment of the outcomes.

Joint and Major/Minor Programmes

- 3.3.17 The University offers a large number of Joint Honours programmes comprising an equal proportion of study in two subjects, and a range of “Major” Honours programmes which can be combined with a “Minor” programme. These programmes are designed, in effect, as the study of two distinct subjects within an overall programme structure leading to a named award. While the learning outcomes for each subject will be coherent and integrated, there will not, necessarily, be the same coherence and integration between the two subjects: indeed, there is not any formal integration or coherence between the two components of many, if not all, Joint and Combined Honours programmes currently offered.

Points of Reference

- 3.3.18 Internal and external points of reference should be used to inform the design of the programme. External reference points might be provided by a national subject benchmark statement, information about similar or parallel programmes elsewhere or expectations of professional or statutory regulatory bodies, or employer expectations (for example as set out in occupational standards). In a student negotiated programme, an inherent part of the negotiation process will involve the student and Adviser in designing the programme, taking into consideration the intended level of the award and jointly agreeing the relevant sources of reference.

Progress Files/Transcripts/European Diploma Supplement/Personal Development and Planning

- 3.3.19 In a joint policy statement on a Progress File for HE (May 2000 – available at www.qaa.ac.uk), the CVCP, COSHEP, SCOP and the QAA have invited institutions to move towards

- providing students with a transcript of their study record and achievements using a standard data set;
- incorporating Personal Development and Planning (PDP) in all provision leading to an HE award

[PDP is defined as a “structured and supported process undertaken by an individual to reflect upon their own learning, performance and/or achievement and to plan for their personal, educational and career development”].

- 3.3.20 At the time of writing, the University’s development of policy in relation to the introduction and support of PDP has been on hold pending publication of the QAA/SACCA guidelines. These have now been received and a PDP Development Group will be bringing recommendations to Senate, via the UCTL, for a system of web-based support accessed via the Student Portal. This system has already been piloted on a small scale. It is intended to complete the development work in time for a full pilot of the system followed by a phased roll-out across the University from the start of 2006/07.

3-10

- 3.3.21 In the guidance (outlined in 3.3.19 above) HEIs were encouraged to introduce a ‘common’ transcript. In addition, there is a commitment within the Bologna

Declaration that all institutions should routinely provide students with a European Diploma Supplement from 2005. Within the sector, work is ongoing to produce a second-wide 'Description of Higher Education in Scotland' which will form the basis of the descriptive element of the 'Diploma Supplement'. In addition, there will be a need for modifications to the University's management information system to enable production of the Diploma Supplement. In common with the rest of the sector, it is unlikely that the full Diploma Supplement will be in place for 2005.

School Approval

- 3.3.22 Course and programme proposals must be approved by the Head(s) of the relevant School(s). Often, approval will be given after consideration by a School committee (larger Schools may have a specific courses and programmes committee to consider relevant proposals; smaller Schools may consider proposals at a meeting of all academic staff).
- 3.3.23 It is essential that the Head of a School which is responsible for a course that is a specified component of a programme sponsored by another School liaises with the Head(s) of the other School(s) (or Programme Co-ordinator in the case of interdisciplinary programmes) in regard to any proposed changes to the course in question. This is to ensure that where, for example, a course is to be amended substantially or withdrawn, the Heads of all other relevant Schools (and, where appropriate, Programme Co-ordinators) are aware of the proposed changes and of the potential implications for students.

College Approval, Central Validation and The Planning Cycle

- 3.3.24 Following School approval, proposals must be submitted by e-mail to the relevant senas e-mail address (given on the form) to the relevant Assistant College Registrar (Teaching & Learning), as all course and programme proposals must be considered by the relevant College Teaching & Learning Committee. These Committees will not undertake an in-depth scrutiny of the academic content of the course or programme proposals, which is a School matter; the arrangements for such School scrutiny will be audited through the Internal Teaching Review procedures (see paragraph 3.5.21 below). The College Teaching & Learning Committee has primary responsibility for the academic scrutiny (as well as consideration of resource and academic planning implications). This includes responsibility for satisfying themselves that the appropriate scrutiny has been undertaken at School level, including consideration of external input. Normally, all proposals are considered by the College Director of Teaching & Learning in advance of the Committee. Where the Convener is content, the approval is simply reported to the Committee. Where issues are identified, the Committee is invited to consider the proposal. Approval will be granted if the proposal is in accord with the College's strategic plan and if the appropriate resources are either in place or if the College is able to allocate additional resources where necessary.
- 3.3.25 The annual planning cycle deadline for submission of course and programme proposals is **30 November**: this date is to ensure that central scrutiny and validation of proposals can be achieved in time for incorporation in the Omnibus Resolution to the Senate in January, and inclusion in relevant publications (e.g. UCAS Handbook; Prospectuses; University Calendar; Catalogue of Courses). Proposals may be considered outwith the normal planning cycle on an *ad hoc* basis if there is good reason for being unable to meet the 30 November deadline.

3-11

- 3.3.26 The Assistant College Registrar (Teaching & Learning) will send a copy of the proposal to the relevant Academic Standards Committee (ASC) Clerk, for consideration by the Academic Standards Committee (Postgraduate) (for courses and for postgraduate taught programmes) or the Academic Standards Committee (Undergraduate) (for undergraduate programmes). The ASCs are the primary

central scrutinising committees and have delegated authority on behalf of the Senate for validation and re-validation of programmes. The ASCs are responsible for ensuring that proposals conform with the University's policies and practices in regard to credit-rating, teaching, learning and assessment practices, and regulatory issues. Through this scrutiny, the ASCs will ensure that programmes are in accord with the requirements of the national qualifications framework and are consistent with the specification of academic standards, as may be defined, for example, by the relevant national subject benchmark statements.

3.3.27 Once approved by the relevant ASC, proposals for the introduction (or withdrawal) of courses and programmes are referred to the Senate, together with any concomitant regulatory changes, for ratification. The Senate is ultimately responsible for the setting, maintenance and assurance of academic standards and may therefore review or amend any proposal referred to it by the relevant validating committee.

Course and Programme Review and Re-Validation

3.3.28 Following modularisation, the University introduced course review procedures based on a standard Student Course Evaluation Form exercise for undergraduate courses and for postgraduate courses and programmes. These procedures are described in paragraphs 3.5.2-3.5.14 below. Appendices 3.7a and 3.7b also refer.

3.3.29 While Schools have continually reviewed programmes informally, the University introduced formal procedures for programme review in 2000/01: these are described in paragraph 3.5.15-3.5.17 below. Annex B to Appendix 3.8 also refers. All programmes are to be reviewed every six years.

3.3.30 In view of the introduction of programme review and of revised New Course and New Programme proposal forms in 2000, the University agreed that all existing programmes should be revalidated by the end of 2001. This required details to be submitted on the New Programme Proposal form (including the preparation of a Programme Specification and Curriculum Map) by 31 October 2001, for consideration by the relevant Faculty Planning Committee (as was in place at that time) and ASC.

3.3.31 With effect from 2005, formal revalidation of programmes will form an integral part of Internal Teaching Review (ITR). The ITR Panel will examine the programme review reports (see 3.3.29 above) and other supporting documentation and will make a recommendation to the relevant ASC for each of a School's programmes unconditional revalidation; revalidation conditional upon a satisfactory response to specific recommendations; or, refuse revalidation.

3.4 The University's Policy in regard to Academic Standards

3.4.1 The University's overall policy in regard to academic standards for undergraduate and postgraduate taught degrees is to ensure that, as far as possible, the standards achieved by those completing a particular programme of study are comparable, both within and between cohorts. The mechanisms put in place by the University to ensure such consistency and comparability of standards are described below. The University's Common Assessment Scale (CAS) and Grade Spectrum for determining honours degree classifications (see Section 7) also provide for a measure of comparability of standards between subjects/programme areas within the University. And the External Examiner system, complemented, where relevant, by professional accreditation of courses, programmes and final awards, and the utilisation of national subject benchmark statements, provides a measure of comparability within the same subject/programme area across institutions.

The Definition of, and Responsibility for, Academic Standards

3.4.2 Standards are made up of three primary elements: (a) the composition of the degree programme in terms of prescribed courses and pass levels; (b) the aims and learning outcomes of programmes and courses; (c) the methods of awarding marks which are based on assessment criteria, marking schemes and the University's Common Assessment Scale. The University has to assure itself that effective means of verifying the standards of awards in terms of these elements are in place.

3.4.3 The University believes that the definition of the academic standards of a particular subject/programme of study and the associated awards should rest primarily with those who are experts in the subject/programme area: i.e. with those academic staff who design, deliver, examine and review the programme and, in particular, its constituent courses. Several individuals or groups of individuals therefore share collective responsibility for defining academic standards:-

- the individual teachers who, as members of Course Teams, collectively design, deliver, assess and review the constituent elements (courses) of a programme of study in light of the national subject benchmark statement, where applicable;
- course and programme co-ordinators, who oversee course and programme design, prescribe the syllabus and organise its delivery, specify the resources required for successful delivery, and co-ordinate the review of courses and programmes;
- members of academic Schools, who are responsible not only for endorsing proposals to amend existing, or introduce new, courses and programmes but also for determining the level at which a particular course should be offered and for proposing the composition of the programme's prescribed courses;
- Heads of School (or equivalent), who are responsible ultimately for approving courses and programme proposals at the School level, and for ensuring that adequate resources are made available;
- members of College Teaching & Learning Committees and the College Director of Teaching & Learning, who give College approval to courses and programmes being offered, and the Heads of College who sanction the allocation and use of College resource when appropriate;

- members of Academic Standards Committees, who validate (and re-validate) courses and programmes and assign appropriate credits;
 - College Directors of Teaching & Learning, members of Internal Teaching Review Panels and members of the Academic Standards Committees, who collectively oversee the review of courses and programmes and of Schools' teaching and learning activities;
 - Examiners (both internal and external), who determine the final marks awarded to students in relation to individual courses and programme.
- 3.4.4 The quality of the staff who undertake or support these activities is paramount. The procedure for Chair appointments provides for wide searches for potential candidates and a rigorous scrutiny of candidates' suitability, with excellence as the touchstone. A similar approach is used for all appointments. A major element in the University's staffing strategy is the enhanced provision of staff development. Staff recruitment and development procedures are discussed more fully in sub-section 3.7 below.
- 3.4.5 There is also corporate responsibility for academic standards. An institution must put in place mechanisms to ensure that the appropriate levels of academic and personal support and an appropriate teaching and learning environment exist to allow students to fulfil their potential and achieve the highest level of award on completion of a programme of study. There must also be institutional-wide mechanisms for monitoring and assuring academic standards.
- 3.4.6 For the vast majority of its degree programmes, the University offers a modular structure in which students have varying degrees of autonomy and flexibility in choosing their curriculum. This is particularly the case in the first two years of undergraduate study, when students may follow a variety of courses offered by several Schools. Similar opportunities may exist in the third year of study for those following non-Honours programmes or for those students following joint or major/minor Honours programmes in two subject areas. Consequently, the University believes that the academic standards of the final awards associated with a particular programme of study are linked inextricably with those of its constituent elements.

The Maintenance, Verification and Monitoring of Academic Standards

- 3.4.7 There are nine primary mechanisms by which academic standards within the University are maintained:-
- validation of individual courses and programmes by the College Teaching and Learning Committees and the Academic Standards Committees, which includes confirmation that relevant external standards and reference points, such as the national subject benchmark statements, have been utilised in designing learning outcomes and the level of an award;
 - accreditation of courses, programmes and awards by professional bodies, where appropriate;
 - Internal Teaching Reviews;

- programme revalidation as part of Internal Teaching Review;
- insistence on and monitoring of student attendance and course work;
- the use of a Common Assessment Scale (CAS) throughout the University, with common definitions for Honours and non-Honours courses in relation to the various CAS bands;
- the requirement for all written examination scripts for Honours and postgraduate taught students to be double-marked independently and marked anonymously (i.e. with candidates identified by number and not by name);
- the requirement for all Final Meetings of Examiners to apply a University-wide *Grade Spectrum* for determining degree classification in all degree programmes;
- the External Examiner's role in the moderation of assessments, by adjudicating when internal examiners differ in their assessment of particular candidates, and in determining which side of the boundary (pass/fail or borderline between degree classifications) a candidate should be placed. Those internal examiners who serve as External Examiners elsewhere also play a key role in helping to ensure comparability of standards.

3.4.8 In spite of some concerns expressed about the external examining system⁴, the University holds the view that the External Examiner plays a crucial role in verifying and monitoring academic standards, both within the University and across higher education. Details of the University's practices and policies in regard to external examining in taught courses and programmes are given in Section 9. Paragraphs 3.5.10-3.5.13 below also refer.

3.4.9 The QAA's audit team that visited the University in 1998 noted "... from both its discussions and analysis of documentation, that University academic staff and external examiners greatly valued the use of the CAS and the Grade Spectrum as a contribution to assuring the security and comparability of academic standards". The audit team "found commendable the use of the CAS and the Grade Spectrum in the assessment of students' work which, in its view, play an important part in maintaining comparability across the degree programmes of the University". Details of the CAS and Grade Spectrum, and of the University's other assessment and examination policies, are given in Section 7.

⁴ Strengthening External Examining - HEQC 1996

The Review of Academic Standards

3.4.10 The effectiveness of the University's policy in regard to the maintenance of academic standards is monitored internally by those with responsibility for reviewing programmes of study, reviews that are audited via Internal Teaching Reviews (paragraph 3.5.21 refers). An essential element of programme review is the analysis of relevant performance indicators (entry qualifications; progression rates; course and degree assessment outcomes; first-destination statistics). This would lead to the review of the academic standards associated with a particular award/programme of study, where appropriate, and might include changes to the programme's prescribed courses; to the assessment methods; and to the learning outcomes of the courses and programme. These often would be discussed with the relevant External Examiner (and professional body, where appropriate), prior to submission via the University's formal committee structure (paragraph 3.3.26 refers).

3.5 Quality Control Mechanisms

3.5.1 The University has established several mechanisms for quality control to verify whether a School's management of teaching, learning and assessment activities is satisfactory, leads to quality enhancement, and is in accord with the University's policies and practices. These are described below.

Course Review

3.5.2 The University requires all courses to be reviewed annually. Since Schools are responsible for the design, delivery and assessment of courses, they are clearly best placed to undertake course review. The responsibility for course review therefore rests firmly with Heads of School. Full details are provided in:-

- **Appendix 3.7a [Course Review : Notes for Guidance of Course Co-ordinators, Heads of School, Heads of College and Members of Academic Standards Committees];**
- **Appendix 3.7b [Postgraduate Review: Taught Courses and Programmes: Notes for Guidance of Course and Programme Co-ordinators, Heads of School, and Members of the Academic Standards Committee (Postgraduate)].**

3.5.3 To assist Schools in undertaking course review, the University has put in place three formal mechanisms in relation to course feedback, which are outlined below:-

- the **Student Course Evaluation Form** exercise;
- the requirement that all Schools establish a **Staff:Student Liaison Committee**, with substantial student representation;
- the requirement for **External Examiners** to report annually.

Student Course Evaluation Form

3.5.4 A University-wide Student Course Evaluation Form (SCEF) was introduced in 1990, with pre-set questions approved by the University Committee on Teaching and Learning to seek undergraduate students' views on the quality of the teaching and learning experience afforded by a particular course. The form has been reviewed periodically, and is flexible in that it allows Schools to design their own questions to elicit feedback specifically in relation to their courses and School. Analogous procedures were adopted by the Academic Standards Committee (Postgraduate) for implementation in 1997/98 in relation to seeking feedback from postgraduate taught courses. At the time of writing, the SCEF procedures were undergoing review by a Working Group on Student & Graduate Feedback established by the University Committee on Teaching & Learning. The Working Group is scheduled to report in 2004/05.

3.5.5 The SCEF is the cornerstone of the University's mechanisms for seeking feedback from students. The main features of the exercise are listed below:-

- the SCEF exercise is undertaken each half-session for all courses offered;
- Course Co-ordinators discuss the outcome with the Course Team and report to the Head of School;
- Heads of School report to their Staff:Student Liaison Committee and College Director of Teaching & Learning, and to the relevant Academic Standards Committee;
- policy issues are referred to the University Committee on Teaching and Learning.
- Standard forms to assist Course Co-ordinators and Heads of School in reporting the outcome of the SCEF and course review exercises can be downloaded at:-

www.abdn.ac.uk/registry/download.hti

3.5.6 Although it is a Head of School's responsibility to ensure that the exercise is conducted, in practice Course Co-ordinators are responsible for organising such feedback. Further details are provided in Appendices 3.7a and 3.7b.

Staff : Student Liaison Committees (SSLC)

3.5.7 School Staff:Student Liaison Committees meet at least once each half-session, usually within five weeks of the start of teaching. There are two main purposes of the Committee:-

- consideration of any issues arising from the previous half-session's Student Course Evaluation Form Exercise;
- identification of any problems with the current half-session's courses which might require immediate attention.

- 3.5.8 Heads of School are responsible for closing the “feedback loop” to students concerning the outcome of the SCEF exercise. This is achieved by the Minutes of the Staff:Student Liaison Committee being posted on relevant School Noticeboards. Some Schools also publicise these on their WWW sites. Others incorporate specific items in course/School handbooks indicating changes which have been made as a direct consequence of student (and other) feedback.
- 3.5.9 Most SSLCs have a majority of students as members, usually Class Representatives elected by their peers (Section 5 refers). Depending on the nature of a particular course and of the programme(s) with which it is associated, there will either be one Class Representative for each course or, in the case of curricula with a substantial number of prescribed courses (e.g. medicine, law, engineering, divinity) there may be one Class Representative for each year/level of study. Some Schools which have a substantial number of postgraduate taught programmes and students have established a separate SSLC in relation to such provision.

External Examiners’ Reports

- 3.5.10 External Examiners for undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes are required to submit a formal report to the Principal by 31 October relating to their activities in the previous academic year. The form is annotated by an administrator in the Registry to highlight any issues raised by an External Examiner that require attention. It is then copied to the Convener of the University Committee on Teaching and Learning, and to the relevant College Director of Teaching & Learning (via the Assistant College Registrar (Teaching & Learning)), Head of School and Convener of the appropriate Academic Standards Committee (ASC). The ASC Conveners also inform Assistant College Registrars of any areas of concern that have not hitherto been highlighted for action.
- 3.5.11 Assistant College Registrars request Heads of Schools’ comments on any areas of concern expressed by their relevant External Examiner(s). Often a School will automatically accept an External Examiner’s suggestions, many of which will have been discussed with the External Examiner (e.g. at the Final Examiners’ Meeting) and implemented prior to receipt of the formal report.
- 3.5.12 College Directors of Teaching & Learning submit a report to the relevant Academic Standards Committee, outlining how a School has responded to External Examiners’ comments. Policy issues raised by an External Examiner are referred by the ASC to the UCTL.
- 3.5.13 Heads of School are responsible for closing the “feedback loop” to External Examiners by informing them of the School’s and, where appropriate, the University’s response to an External Examiner’s comments.
- 3.5.14 Details on the role of External Examiners for taught courses and programmes are provided in Section 9.

Programme Review

3.5.15 In its *Analytical Account* submitted to the Quality Assurance Agency in 1998 in preparation for an academic quality audit, the University identified a need to introduce formal programme review procedures: hitherto, these had been left to Schools to implement. Formal programme review procedures were therefore introduced in August 2000, following internal consideration of the QAA's section of its Code of Practice on Programme Approval, Monitoring and Review.

3.5.16 The aims of Programme Review are:-

- to ensure that the aims and learning outcomes of a programme are up-to-date and reflect developments in the subject, including, where appropriate, the relevant national subject benchmark statements;
- to ascertain whether the design, delivery and assessment of a programme and its constituent courses are appropriate to allow a programme's aims and learning outcomes to be achieved and demonstrated;
- to ensure that the academic standards achieved by students are appropriate and consistent and that the associated awards are in accord with the national qualifications framework;
- to ensure that the quality of the learning experience gives all students the opportunity to achieve the highest possible standards of the associated award;
- to confirm that the programme specification reflects accurately the requirements of the programme and identifies the general skills, knowledge and attributes that those who complete the programme successfully will be able to demonstrate.

3.5.17 The **Programme Review** procedures were revised in February 2001, and are detailed in **Appendix 3.8 and Annex B**. Since, at that time, the QAA had proposed a six-year cycle for external Subject Review, programme review and, hence, programme re-validation, were also placed on a six-year cycle. In summary, Schools are required to complete a Programme Review Report for each of their main programme groupings and submit it with their Internal Teaching Review documentation (paragraph 3.5.21 below refers).

Other Forms of Feedback

3.5.18 The above quality control mechanisms are complemented by feedback from employers, from graduates, and from professional bodies.

3.5.19 Several Schools have established Employer Liaison Groups or equivalent committees, and those in which programmes are accredited by professional organisations often maintain strong links with employers. Other Schools will seek formal or informal feedback from relevant employers on an individual basis. Such feedback may relate to individual course or programme content, or specifically to particular skills and attributes which employers might be seeking from a graduate of a particular discipline.

3.5.20 Some Schools are strong in maintaining contact with their graduates e.g. through graduate societies or by holding regular events to which graduates are invited. Feedback, both formal and informal, on the School's Honours courses and programmes in relation to how well these have prepared the graduates for their subsequent training or employment may therefore be obtained in this manner.

Internal Teaching Reviews

3.5.21 The University's Internal Teaching Review procedures are the cornerstone of the University's quality assurance procedures. The procedures were introduced in 1994, strengthened in 1996, and further revised in 2000/01 to reflect changes in the UK-wide arrangements for the external assurance of quality and standards that had been formulated by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). The Internal Teaching Review procedures were revised again in 2002 to take account of the new *Quality Enhancement Framework* introduced by SHEFC.

3.5.22 The aims of an Internal Teaching Review are:-

- to provide a formal opportunity for a School⁵ to reflect on, and critically evaluate, its teaching and learning provision and to benefit from a constructive dialogue with, and commentary by, a Panel of senior academics from outwith the School, an external subject specialist(s) and a student representative;
- to monitor a subject provider's arrangements for course and programme design, approval, delivery, monitoring and review and to satisfy the University that quality and standards in teaching and learning are being maintained and enhanced, and that any areas of concern in this regard are addressed;
- to encourage subject providers to discuss with the Internal Teaching Review Panel any innovations and successes in teaching and learning that they have implemented, any plans for future changes, and to highlight any impediments to the development of higher quality teaching and learning provision;
- to discuss the School's arrangements for training and supervision of its research students.

3.5.23 The process is summarised below:-

- submission of documentation by a School;
- review of the documentation by an independent Panel made up of staff from the University, a student representative appointed by the Students' Association, and one or more subject specialists from other institutions;
- Panel Visit to the School to meet staff and students;
- production of a Report, for consideration by the School;
- consideration, by the relevant Academic Standards Committees (ASCs), of the Head of School's and Head of College's response to the Panel's recommendations;
- consideration, by the ASCs, of the Head of School's progress report on implementation of the recommendations one year following the ASC's consideration of the Panel's Report.

⁵ In certain areas, reviews have been conducted at a discipline rather than School level.

3.5.24 A suite of documents has been prepared to assist those involved with Internal Teaching Reviews, as listed below:-

Appendix 3.8: Information for Those Preparing for Internal Teaching Review. This includes a number of Annexes:

Annex A: Self-Evaluation Document Template

Annex B: Programme Review Report Form

Annex C: Postgraduate Research Student Training and Supervision Report Form

Annex D: Internal Teaching Review Schedule

Appendix 3.9: Internal Teaching Review: Guidance Notes for Staff invited to meet Visiting Panels

Appendix 3.10: Internal Teaching Review: An Introduction for Students

Appendix 3.11: Internal Teaching Review: Information for Panel Members and Clerks

3.5.25 Internal Teaching Review reports identify both commendable aspects of a School's provision and also generate a series of recommendations in regard to the enhancement of its teaching and learning activities. In addition, good practice that might be considered for wider dissemination within the University is specifically highlighted.

Audit Files

3.5.26 The Senate, on 7 June 1995, agreed that Schools should, on a regular basis, maintain files of documentation which were likely to be required for academic audit purposes. These "Audit Files" should include the reports relating to the SCEF exercise; extracts from School Committees (e.g. Staff:Student Liaison Committee; Teaching Committee [or equivalent]); External Examiners' Reports; statistical data and analyses; new course and programme proposals; student handbooks; and Programme Review, Internal Teaching Review, TQA, Subject Review, and accreditation reports, where applicable. Many of these are required Appendices for Internal Teaching Review Submissions (see Appendix 3.8 for further details).

3.5.27 It is recommended that Audit Files contain the above documents in separate sections. This will allow any action to be taken as a consequence of, for example, External Examiners' Reports to be included with the relevant reports to confirm that follow-up action has been taken where necessary and that recommendations have been implemented.

3.6 Quality Enhancement

Educational Development and Innovation in Teaching and Learning

A brief history of Education Development at the University of Aberdeen

- 3.6.1 The Centre for Educational Development (CED) assisted all Schools in producing an Enterprise Protocol as part of the Enterprise in Higher Education Programme during the early-mid 1990s. This led to greater awareness of innovations in teaching and learning practice. The CED provided advice and staff development in the areas of teaching and learning practice and innovation such as group work/learning and peer assessment; on the issue of how transferable skills might be developed and assessed; and on how to prepare educational aims and learning outcomes in relation to courses and programmes.
- 3.6.2 Since an important aspect of CED activity related to staff training and development, the Centre merged with the Staff Development and Training Unit, in 1998, to form the Centre for Learning and Professional Development (CLPD).
- 3.6.3 In order to provide a more integrated service to the University, the staff of the CLPD were integrated within the Human Resources Office in 2000/01, creating the **Educational & Staff Development Unit (ESDU)**. Details of the Unit's activities are described in sub-section 11.1. Sub-section 3.7 below also refers.

Learning Technology Unit

- 3.6.4 The Learning Technology Unit (LTU) was set up in 1998/99 to stimulate, promote and support the deployment of learning technologies within the Colleges of Arts & Social Sciences and Physical Sciences, and the Schools of Biological Sciences and Psychology. [Support for Schools of Medicine and Medical Sciences is provided by the Medi-CAL Unit, based at the Medical School]. The LTU works closely with the Educational & Staff Development Unit and the Academic Learning & Study Unit.
- 3.6.5 The LTU is line-managed from within the Directorate of Information Systems & Services but its activities are directed by a Steering Group whose members represent the interests of the teaching and learning community.
- 3.6.6 Specifically, the role of the LTU is to provide advice and assistance to academic teaching departments with the identification, development, implementation and evaluation of appropriate new technologies to support and enhance teaching and learning provision. The LTU promotes innovation and good practice in the deployment of the full range of learning technologies, including e-learning, computer-assisted assessment and collaborative online learning. Support is provided in the use of WebCT [the University's supported Virtual Learning Environment], the accessibility of online learning materials and online copyright issues. Further details are provided in Section 11, paragraph 11.2.14.
- 3.6.7 The relative success of the LTU can be measured by the number of annual proposal submissions [more than one hundred since its inception] and in the exponential increase in take-up of WebCT as the principal means of providing online documentation and support [approximately 1000 courses now use WebCT].

C&IT Skills and Information Skills

- 3.6.8 As a consequence of reviewing skills provision, the Senate (13 June 2001) approved a **Policy on Communication and Information Technology (C&IT) Skills (Appendix 3.12)**. In recognition of the rapid rate of change in the use of C&IT, a further review of the University's strategy for developing student C&IT skills is scheduled for 2004/05, to ensure that every graduate acquires an appropriate level of competence (see section 3.8 of the University of Aberdeen Strategic Plan 2004-2009 – <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/admin/ambition.hti#qlearning>).
- 3.6.9 Essential C&IT Skills are incorporated into the learning outcomes of all undergraduate degree programmes. In some programmes, the skills will be embedded within core courses that relate to the academic discipline being studied. In other programmes, students will acquire the skills by completing specific C&IT courses.
- 3.6.10 Instruction on the use of information resources, including electronic information resources, is embedded within academic courses, as appropriate. Much of this instruction is done by Information Consultants, based in the University Library. The Information Consultants also run additional, optional workshops on specific topics and are available to provide one-to-one advice and guidance to students.
- 3.6.11 A compulsory *Information Skills* course for all first-year MA, Land Economy, Education and Divinity undergraduates takes place at the beginning of the first half-session. This course provides an induction to the University's C&IT facilities and instruction on the basic C&IT skills of word-processing, e-mail and use of the web. Building on this foundation, additional independent learning materials on more advanced skills, including the web and optional workshops are available for those students who would like further assistance. For Science students, a complementary course, entitled *Tools for Science*, is available. The C&IT component of this course provides instruction to the level of the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL).
- 3.6.12 From the above platform, all undergraduate students will be able to acquire a range of additional C&IT and Information Skills before graduation. Where these are not embedded within an individual programme of study, students may, in their own time, attend voluntary workshops or work through exercise and self-testing material provided on the Web.

Provisions for Students with Disabilities and Medical Conditions

- 3.6.13 The section of the QAA's Code of Practice on Students with Disabilities, together with incoming legislation, put a responsibility on the University to develop inclusive policies, practices and modes of teaching which ensure that disabled students have equal access to the quality of learning opportunities in Higher Education.
- 3.6.14 One response to the Code of Practice has been a revision to the University's New Course Proposal form: from the Summer of 2000, those designing a course have been required to specifically consider the potential requirements of students with disabilities when designing methods of delivering and assessing course learning outcomes. Schools have also been asked to consider these aspects for existing courses. The aim is to ensure that, as far as practicable, all courses are fully inclusive and accessible to all students.

- 3.6.15 In 2000-2001, the University took part in a number of disability needs analyses, funded by SHEFC. The purpose of these analyses was to provide an external view on the appropriateness of the University's provision.
- 3.6.16 Skill: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities conducted an audit of our policies, procedures and practices, particularly with respect to the selection, admission, registration and assessment of students with disabilities and medical conditions. They also considered the areas of staff development, general facilities and specialist support. The recommendations made by the auditors are being acted upon, under the guidance of the Disability Adviser and the Vice-Principal (Teaching and Learning).
- 3.6.17 The *Teachability* project, developed by a consortium of Scottish Universities and led by the University of Strathclyde, is based on the premise that to deliver an accessible curriculum requires a self-conscious, critical examination of the curriculum. Core elements should be well-defined, course information should be accurate, flexibility should exist and adaptations made, where possible. In 2001, two departments were assisted by staff from the *Teachability* project to examine the accessibility of their curricula and to work towards improvements for existing and future disabled students. It is intended that this will be rolled out to all academic departments in 2001-2003.

Learning from Internal and External Reports and Publications

- 3.6.18 Academic quality audit, teaching quality assessment, internal teaching reviews, professional accreditation reports, and feedback from External Examiners, students and employers should lead to a continual enhancement of the quality of individual courses and programmes, and of a School's educational provision in general.
- 3.6.19 Relevant publications produced by the various "quality" agencies (e.g. HEQC, SHEFC, CVCP, QAA, Universities UK) are considered by the University Committee on Teaching and Learning (UCTL), which highlights any issues of relevance to enhancing the quality of the University's teaching and learning activities and environment.
- 3.6.20 At the subject level, good practice arising from SHEFC Teaching Quality Assessment reports, from QAA Subject Review reports or from Internal Teaching Review reports, which might be promoted more widely within the University, would be referred to the UCTL for consideration and, as appropriate, dissemination. Heads of College, as quality managers, fulfil a major quality enhancement role at the College and School level by taking forward relevant issues arising from the above activities.

Course and Programme Review

- 3.6.21 Feedback from students, external examiners and employers, as well as from the academic staff who teach on courses and programmes, is obtained through formal course and programme review activities, and will lead to quality enhancement at the subject level. Details are provided in sub-section 3.3 above.

Internal Teaching Review

- 3.6.22 Since 1996, Internal Teaching Review reports have highlighted commendable practice within Schools and also resulted in a series of recommendations. In taking forward the latter, there has been a continual enhancement of the quality of teaching and learning provision within Schools.
- 3.6.23 Since 1999/2000, Internal Teaching Review reports have specifically highlighted good practice in a School that might be considered, by the relevant Academic Standards Committee, for wider dissemination within the University. Further details of the procedures are provided in paragraphs 3.5.21-3.5.25 above.

External Accreditation

- 3.6.24 Although accreditation reports from Professional and Statutory Bodies (PSB) would inform planning and review at the School level, they were not routinely considered centrally prior to the 1998 Academic Quality Audit visit.
- 3.6.25 As a consequence of the 1998 Audit Report, arrangements for the consideration of PSB reports and the monitoring of subsequent action and feedback have been systematised in a similar manner to the reports of external examiners. The following procedures for the consideration of PSB reports have therefore been in place since 1999/2000:-

- Heads of School should send the Academic Registrar a copy of all reports from Professional and Statutory Bodies (PSB) (including Accreditation Reports) as soon as these have been received by the School.
- Issues arising from PSB/Accreditation Reports which require action will be highlighted by a member of the Registry. At this stage, examples of good practice highlighted in a report also will be noted, for consideration as to whether such good practice should be promoted more widely within the University: this will provide the opportunity to learn from professional input arising from accreditation visits.
- Copies of reports will be circulated to the Convener of the University Committee on Teaching and Learning, the relevant Head of College (via the College Registrar), and the Convener of the relevant Academic Standards Committee.
- Heads of College will seek a Head of School's response to any issues arising from a report and forward these to the relevant Academic Standards Committee.
- Academic Standards Committees will consider School and College responses to any issues arising from PSB/Accreditation Reports and, where necessary, will enter into dialogue with the relevant Head of School and Head of College if there are any concerns with a programme of study or its constituent courses. The ASC will refer any policy issues to the UCTL.

Enhancement-led Institutional Review

- 3.6.26 Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR), which forms part of SHEFC's Quality Enhancement Framework, is conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency once every four years. Further details on ELIR are provided in Section 2, sub-section 2.5.

External Reference Points

3.6.27 As indicated in sub-section 2.2, the QAA, to support its new approach to the review of quality and standards, has published the following documents:-

- guidance on developing **Programme Specifications**, to help institutions set out clearly the intended outcomes of their programmes;
- **National Subject Benchmark Statements**, to provide a means for the academic community to describe the nature and characteristics of programmes in a specific subject. They also represent general expectations about the standards for the award of qualifications at a given level and articulate the attributes and capabilities that those possessing such qualifications should be able to demonstrate;
- **Codes of Practice** in the areas recommended by the Dearing Report, to promulgate good practice in relation to the support of student learning and the maintenance of academic standards. The various sections of the Code, taken together, will form an overall *Code of Practice for the Assurance of Academic Quality and Standards in Higher Education*, for the guidance of higher education institutions;
- the **Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland** (and a complementary framework for HE qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland).

3.6.28 The following sections of the QAA's *Code of Practice* have been published and can be accessed at www.qaa.ac.uk

- Section 1: Postgraduate Research Programmes (September 2004)
- Section 2: Collaborative Provision and Flexible and Distributed Learning (September 2004)
- Section 3: Students with Disabilities (October 1999)
- Section 4: External Examining (August 2004)
- Section 5: Academic Appeals and Student Complaints on Academic Matters (March 2000)
- Section 6: Assessment of Students (May 2000)
- Section 7: Programme Approval, Monitoring and Review (April 2000)
- Section 8: Career Education, Information and Guidance (January 2001)
- Section 9: Placement Learning (July 2001)
- Section 10: Recruitment and Admissions (September 2001)

3.6.29 The Subject Benchmark Statements are primarily for use at the School level, to inform Schools in the review of their programmes. As part of the University's decision to re-validate all its existing provision by the end of 2001, Programme Specifications, which take account of Subject Benchmark Statements where relevant, will be prepared for all programmes, together with Curriculum Maps indicating how the programme's learning outcomes will be delivered and assessed within the programme's constituent courses.

3.6.30 The various sections of the QAA's *Code of Practice* and the Qualifications Framework have been considered by the University Committee on Teaching and Learning, and by other committees where appropriate. Where the University's existing practice did not meet the expectations of these external reference documents, consideration has been given as to whether new procedures should be implemented; and, where appropriate, policy issues have been referred to the Senate.

3.6.31 Examples of quality enhancement arising from the consideration of the above external publications are the introduction of formal programme review procedures, and a strengthening of the University's assessment and external examining policies and practices, as detailed in Sections 7 and 9, respectively.

University Committee on Teaching and Learning

3.6.32 The University Committee on Teaching and Learning (UCTL) plays a pivotal role in quality enhancement. In addition to continually reviewing the University's educational policies, the UCTL periodically establishes working parties to advise the Committee on relevant issues in regard to teaching and learning. In the past three years, working parties have been established to consider the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework; academic appeals and complaints; advising, personal development planning (PDP), student and graduate feedback and placement learning.

Quality Enhancement Strategy

3.6.33 In its Corporate Plan for 2000-03, the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (SHEFC) stated that "the Council will continue to discuss with institutions how it can support strategic approaches to quality issues", and that "the Council will, by summer 2001, establish a strategic framework for quality enhancement".

3.6.34 As part of the above development, SHEFC decided to introduce a new condition of its main teaching and research grants to institutions which linked main funding for teaching and research to satisfactory progress on relevant major policies. The Council therefore proposed that new conditions of grant be introduced from 2002-03 to focus on the following areas:-

- widening participation;
- continuous improvement of teaching and learning;
- research and knowledge transfer;
- human resource policies and management.

3.6.35 The above areas reflected the current key priorities in ministerial guidance to SHEFC and the Council's strategic priorities as expressed in its Corporate Plan. As a condition of grant, institutions would therefore be required to have in place, and implement effectively, strategies and key actions which, in the Council's judgement, are satisfactory for:-

- widening participation, including delivery, equality of opportunity in student applications, selection, admissions and support services;
- continuous improvement of learning and teaching;
- research and knowledge transfer;
- human resources, covering all staff i.e. senior management, academic, non-academic, contract research staff etc.

3.6.36 Building on these developments, SHEFC introduced a new package of quality-related measures – the *Quality Enhancement Framework* – in 2003. This has two key aims:

- to pass primary responsibility and initiative for educational quality matters back to HE institutions;
- to shift the focus of activities from quality assurance to quality enhancement, defined as: “taking deliberate steps to bring about continuous (sic) improvement in the effectiveness of the learning experience of students” (QAA Handbook for Enhancement-Led Institutional Review).

The QEF consists of five interlinked elements:

1. An end to external (i.e. QAA-led) subject review. Internal Teaching Review only.
2. National standards for the information to be made public about quality.
3. Better student inputs to institutional quality systems.
4. Sector-wide themes to guide QE activities: Quality Enhancement Engagements (QEEs).
5. A new system of Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR).

3.6.37 To guide its response to the new framework, the University produced a Quality Enhancement Strategy, which was approved by Senate in November 2003. The Quality Enhancement Strategy is published as Appendix 3.13 of the Academic Quality Handbook. The Strategy sets out the key definitions and principles guiding the University’s quality enhancement activities, and the various mechanisms it uses to safeguard academic standards and improve the quality of the education it provides for its students. The Strategy is kept under review by QUEST: the *Quality Enhancement Strategy Team*. Annex A to Appendix 3.13 gives the remit and composition of QUEST.

3.6.38 The Quality Enhancement Strategy incorporates action points that identify specific QE-related activities to be carried through in a given academic year. Current action points are set out in Annex B to Appendix 3.13.

<h3>3.7 Staff Recruitment and Development</h3>
--

3.7.1 The means by which the University assures itself that all those who have a teaching role have the necessary skills, commitment and knowledge to teach effectively is described below.

3.7.2 Line managers and individuals themselves have the key responsibilities, but they will be supported in their task by members of the Human Resources Office.

3.7.3 The key areas for the assurance of quality and standards are as follows:-

- Appointment Procedures;
- Initial Development;
- Developing Staff for Special Roles e.g. Advisers of Studies;
- Continuous Professional Development and Performance Evaluation;
- Appraisal and Promotion Procedures.

Appointment Procedures

- 3.7.4 For all appointments where teaching is important, as much weight is given to teaching aptitude as to other aspects, and it is now general policy that short-listed candidates should normally give a presentation on a topic of their choice as part of the selection process. Where newly qualified staff lack the necessary training and development the University is committed to identifying the need and providing appropriate development.

Initial Development of Staff

- 3.7.5 The University is committed to ensuring that all those who have support student learning are adequately developed. This is provided through the following routes, co-ordinated and delivered by ESDU:

Introduction to Learning and Teaching in Higher Education course

- 3.7.6 The Introduction to Learning and Teaching in Higher Education is a mandatory, three-day course for new lecturers on probation at the University. The course explores the relationships between teaching and learning from the perspective of both staff and student, enabling new staff to define a critical rationale for their own teaching practice. It goes on to provide a framework for understanding the current contexts of higher education, both in Scotland and more widely across the UK. Staff are also made aware of the various support and advice mechanisms available to them.

Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Teaching

- 3.7.7 The Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Teaching is a credit-bearing programme, professionally accredited by the Higher Education Academy. Its intended audience is all staff who are teaching or involved in learning support at the University. Its aims are to enable participants to develop a structured approach to their teaching and learning activities, and to think systematically about their own professional development.

- 3.7.8 The curriculum is divided into two courses, each bearing 30 credits. The first course is designed to help develop a structured approach to the design of learning environments, and in so doing also encourage staff to think systematically about their own professional development in the teaching and learning arena. The second course is designed to help to develop and expand a sense of wider learning and teaching activities, and provides the opportunity to carry out a piece of action research based on the individual's own teaching practice. Further details are available at: <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/hr/esdu/pgcert.htm>

Postgraduate Demonstrators

- 3.7.9 ESDU staff contribute aspects on teaching and learning to the three College Induction programmes for postgraduate demonstrators.

Programme of courses for postgraduate demonstrators, teaching assistants, postdoctoral and contract research staff with occasional teaching duties

- 3.7.10 A series of courses designed around the needs of the above groups of staff have been run since 2002. These courses build upon and extend the range of materials and concepts of teaching and learning introduced during the three Colleges' "Induction for Postgraduates" courses. Support is also made available for these staff if they wish to apply to become Associate Registered Practitioners of the Higher Education Academy.

Bespoke Development

- 3.7.11 Further bespoke development can be made available upon request for Teaching Assistants, foreign Language Assistants, Demonstrators, and those with honorary teaching appointments.

Open programme of courses

- 3.7.12 All staff with roles in the support of student learning are provided with development opportunities through a range of training courses. A typical programme would include courses covering:

- Reflective Practice for Staff in HE
- Principles of Assessment
- Presentation Skills
- Course Planning and Design
- Working with Groups: Practice and Assessment
- Introducing Personal Development Planning for Students
- Encouraging Critical Thinking with Students
- Promoting Interactivity in Large Lectures
- Supporting Staff in applying for Registered Practitioner Status of the Higher Education Academy

along with opportunities to engage with the latest national developments in higher education teaching introduced through the annual Quality Enhancement themes.

Bespoke Delivery

- 3.7.13 All of the courses available in the open programme, along with requests for specific courses, can be tailored and delivered to individual discipline areas, Schools or Colleges subject to availability of resource.

Projects and Ongoing Development

- 3.7.14 ESDU staff work in partnership with academic staff to support existing work and to encourage innovation in learning and teaching. This approach has led, for example, to the development of an on-line Personal Development Planning (PDP) tool for undergraduates.

Continuous Professional Development and Performance Evaluation

- 3.7.15 Individuals, Heads of School have a special responsibility for identifying personal development needs. The Human Resources Office may also refer individuals for special support.

- 3.7.16 Additionally, development for existing staff and Schools is stimulated in response to the outcomes from:

- teaching quality assessments, subject reviews and internal teaching reviews;
- feedback from students, peers and employers on courses;
- reflective and evaluative work internal to Schools;
- The University's staff appraisal systems.

3.7.17 Currently, strategic development for teaching and learning focuses on the following areas:-

- remedial support for staff and courses which are identified in need of improved practice;
- helping staff and Schools become more reflective in their work;
- greater use of task and problem-based learning, learning in self-managed groups;
- greater and more effective use of learning technologies;
- improved assessment methods.

Appraisal and Promotion Procedures

3.7.18 The appraisal system, first introduced in 1988/89, has been reviewed. The revised scheme was piloted during 2001/02 and a second round of appraisal discussions is currently taking place. Appraisal procedures will be revised to reflect the changes being implemented through the development of the Framework Agreement.

3.7.19 The promotion procedures for academic staff also are currently being reviewed, with a view to making them more transparent. This work is being taken forward through the Framework Agreement Steering Group and the review will include consideration of how best to recognise and reward excellence and innovation in teaching.

Relief Teaching

3.7.20 Occasionally, relief teachers are appointed on a fixed-term basis. The University Committee on Teaching and Learning has approved the following recommendations in regard to relief teaching, which were noted by the Senate on 14 June 2000:-

- Heads of School should be responsible for identifying relief teachers whom they wished to engage temporarily to undertake the teaching duties of other staff. They should also verify that relief teachers had the experience and ability needed to ensure that the standards and quality of teaching normally required by the School would be maintained.
- Heads of School should send to their Heads of College applications for the appointment of relief teachers, together with confirmation of the length of the appointment, and seek authorisation for such appointments. Heads of School should also copy the information, including the CVs of relief teachers, to the Convener of the relevant Academic Standards Committee for information.

- If a relief teacher was being engaged to undertake the teaching duties of a Course Co-ordinator, the relief teacher should not be identified as the Course Co-ordinator (paragraph 3.3.8 refers). In such cases, Heads of School should identify a member of their full-time academic staff to serve as Course Co-ordinator.
- During the period of appointment of a relief teacher, a member of the School academic staff (normally the Course Co-ordinator) normally should act as his/her mentor. At the start of the temporary appointment, the mentor should give the relief teacher full and clear guidance in writing regarding his/her responsibilities. Normally, also, the mentor or another, senior, member of the academic staff should observe a sample number of the relief teacher's teaching sessions and give him/her appropriate written and oral feedback.