

## **Aims of the Policy**

The aims of this policy are to ensure the:

- safeguarding of academic standards, and the
- assurance and enhancement of academic quality

of all University awards and/or credit bearing provision, however offered. The policy will also apply where appropriate to non-credit bearing academic provision. The policy complements other relevant policies and strategies, including the *Curriculum Design Policy*, and the *Enhancement of Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy*.

## **Definitions of terms used in this policy**

### **Academic standards**

The *safeguarding of academic standards* is the process whereby the University ensures that all awards of University qualifications and/or credits are made on the basis of the achievement of appropriate academic standards.

*Academic standards of taught programmes* are concerned with the appropriateness of intended programme or unit of credit learning outcomes (in relation to programme or unit of credit aims, content and qualification level), the appropriateness of the syllabus (in relation to learning outcomes), and the effectiveness of assessment (in relation to the measurement of the attainment of learning outcomes).

*Academic standards of research degree taught programmes* are concerned with the appropriateness of research degree criteria, student achievement of these criteria, and the effectiveness of assessment (in relation to the measurement of the meeting of research criteria).

### **Academic quality**

*Academic quality* includes those activities that make a contribution to the nature of a student's academic experience including:

- learning, teaching, academic guidance and assessment practices;
- the deployment of learning resources; and
- other mechanisms that determine the quality of a student's engagement with the University, including:
  - student recruitment and admission;
  - progression advice and programme planning;
  - personal development planning;
  - careers advice and guidance;
  - pastoral support;
  - provision of information; and
  - student academic appeal, complaint and grievance procedures.

*Academic quality assurance* is the process whereby the University ensures that the quality of the learning opportunities offered to students are at an appropriate level.

*Academic quality enhancement* describes the explicit processes put in place to improve the student experience over time. A key element of the process of enhancement is the identification and adoption of good practice.

In practice, University academic quality practices and procedures will usually involve elements of both assurance and enhancement.

### **Safeguarding of standards**

Principles relating to the safeguarding of standards are as follows.

For all programmes or units of credit:

- standards will be at an appropriate level for the qualification
- standards will satisfy the requirements of relevant governmental, professional and statutory bodies and similar organisations; and
- academic standards will be regularly monitored and reviewed, so as to ensure currency and relevance of such standards.

For taught programmes or units of credit:

- principles underpinning aims, learning outcomes, teaching, learning and assessment will those as defined in the *Curriculum Design Policy*; and
- the views of recognised domain experts external to, and independent of, the University will be sought when standards are established, monitored or reviewed.

For research programmes or research units of credit:

- research degree criteria will be defined for every research qualification offered by the University;
- these research degree criteria will describe in an explicit, transparent and consistent manner the achievements a student should be able to demonstrate for the award of the qualification;
- these research degree criteria will be appropriately defined with due regard to appropriate reference points;
- demonstration of the meeting of these research degree criteria will be assessed in a sound, secure and appropriate manner; and
- the views of recognised domain experts external to, and independent of, the University will be sought as part of the process of awarding research degrees.

### **Assuring quality**

Principles relating to academic quality assurance are as follows.

- the quality of the student experience will meet the requirements of relevant governmental, professional and statutory bodies, and similar organisations;
- assurance will be informed by robust programme approval, monitoring, review and student feedback processes which explicitly identify and take action to resolve any issues related to the students' academic experience;
- assurance activity will focus on areas where it is judged there is most risk, with areas judged to be sound receiving a commensurately lower level of scrutiny;
- students will be involved in the process of programme approval, development, monitoring and review; and
- the views of external assessors will be taken into account when the quality of programmes is established or reviewed.

### **Enhancing quality**

A key priority for the University will be to enhance the student experience on a continuing basis. In achieving this aim:

- there will be an explicit demonstration of improvement, and therefore measures of the quality of the student experience will be established and regularly monitored;
- where possible, such measures will be based upon already existing data sets such as those derived from quality monitoring reports, student feedback, progression and achievement data etc;
- changes made to improve the student experience will be determined on the basis of sound evidence that they are likely to be effective; and finally,
- it is recognised that any changes made in the spirit of enhancement may themselves pose a risk to quality and where necessary, appropriate contingency plans should be put in place to address any such issues, should they arise.

Enhancing academic quality is a key University aim, and will therefore be :

- actively planned at University level (e.g. by establishing annual enhancement priorities and themes);
- integrated into working practices (for example by being factored into work programmes, role requirements etc);
- encouraged by appropriate incentives (for example, by incorporating into promotion criteria, supported by internal grants etc); and
- underpinned by effective staff development.

### **University oversight of its academic quality and standards**

Those engaged in programme delivery and support are primarily responsible for assuring standards, and assuring enhancing the student experience. The University will maintain institutional oversight of these processes, so as to ensure that these local responsibilities are met and to identify generic issues and opportunities that may arise.

### **Ensuring that requirements with respect to academic quality and standards are accessible and understandable**

The principles presented above are developed in more detail within the learning and quality procedures, academic codes of practice and the academic regulations, which will:

- be regularly reviewed so as to ensure currency and appropriateness, and
- be developed and reviewed in consultation with the deliverers of academic provision and with students.

*This policy was approved by Academic Board at its meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> June 2008, it is due for review by June 2013.*