

ACADEMIC QUALITY HANDBOOK

SECTION 3

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

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.

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3.1 Institutional Responsibility for Academic Standards, Quality Assurance and Enhancement

Committee Structure

- 3.1.1 An *Organisational Chart* of the University's Committee structure is available at www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/governance/minutes-and-agendas135.php. The formal remits and compositions of the major committees with responsibility for Quality Assurance and Enhancements are provided in Appendices [3.2](#) and [3.3](#). These are also available on the University's web-site¹, which includes the names of the Conveners and Clerks, and contact details for the latter.
- 3.1.2 The **Senatus Academicus (Senate)**² has overall responsibility to the University Court for all academic matters relating to teaching and 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](#)).
- 3.1.3 The **Senate Business Committee** serves to shape the Senate agenda and identifies strategic issues for discussion, as well as dealing with some routine elements of Senate business.
- 3.1.4 Much of the detailed work of Senate is delegated to committees, including the **University Committee on Teaching and Learning** (a joint committee of Court and Senate) [[Appendix 3.2](#) refers], which has strategic oversight of all aspects of teaching and learning and the wider student experience, including responsibility 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 UCTL prepares an annual report for consideration by the Senate. The report to the Senate incorporates analysis of data relating to academic appeals, complaints, discipline for the previous year. In addition to the annual report, the UCTL reports to each meeting of the Senate and each meeting of Court on any significant items of teaching and learning policy.
- 3.1.5 **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** (or equivalent). To inform debate at UCTL, meetings of Heads of School are held two weeks before each meeting.
- 3.1.6 Curriculum Reform ideology, processes and reformations have now become assimilated into our mainstream provision and as such the University Committee on Teaching and Learning (UCTL) has subsumed the work of the Curriculum Reform Implementation Board (the body which oversaw the implementation process for the new curriculum). The full remit and composition is detailed in [Appendix 3.2](#).
- 3.1.7 The UCTL has a largely strategic focus, with issues in regard to academic and pastoral support and student progress, and matters of quality assurance, becoming the responsibility of its three Sub-Committees: the **Undergraduate Committee (UGC)**, **Postgraduate Committee (PGC)**, and the **Quality Assurance Committee (QAC)**.

¹ www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/governance/minutes-and-agendas-135.php

² <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/admin/senate/>

- 3.1.8 The **Undergraduate and Postgraduate Committees** were established to give more focused attention to issues affecting the wider student experience of these student groups, and as such their remits include academic and pastoral support, induction, skills development, and student feedback. The UGC, chaired by a College Director of Teaching and Learning, includes the Director of Teaching from each School, the College Directors of Teaching & Learning, Convener of UCTL, and two representatives from the Students' Association. This membership facilitates engagement with staff in Schools who have responsibility for taking forward any policy changes arising from the Learning & Teaching Operational Plan (www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/documents/Operational_Plan_L_and_T_Update_July_13.pdf) and /or UCTL. The PGC is chaired by a College Head of Graduate School and its membership includes the Convener of UCTL, the Convener of the Committee on Research, Income Generation and Commercialisation, all College Heads of Graduate School, an academic member of staff with responsibility for postgraduate matters from each of our thirteen Schools, and two representatives from the Students' Association.
- 3.1.9 The **Quality Assurance Committee** [[Appendix 3.3](#) refers] is responsible, on behalf of UCTL, for the assurance of quality and maintenance of standards across all undergraduate, postgraduate taught and postgraduate taught elements of research provision, for example the approval of course and programme proposals, oversight of external examiner reports and the University's process of internal teaching review.
- 3.1.10 The **Students' Progress Committee**, [[Appendix 3.4](#) refers] responsible to the Senate, , considers cases of undergraduate and postgraduate students who fail to satisfy the progress requirements for a particular degree as prescribed by the Regulations and the waiver of regulations for both undergraduates and postgraduates The SPC is comprised of seven members representing each of the seven areas of study; Arts and Social Sciences, Divinity, Education, Engineering, Law, Science and Medicine and Dentistry.

<p>3.2 College and School Responsibility for Academic Standards, Quality Assurance and Enhancement</p>

- 3.2.1 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 Colleges and Schools, which are best placed to provide the detailed academic scrutiny required in a robust quality assurance system. See also [section 1.4 and 1.5](#).
- 3.2.2 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).

<p>3.3 Course and Programme Design, Approval, Validation and Review</p>
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Course and Programme Proposal Forms (SENAS)

- 3.3.1 The University Committee on Teaching and Learning (UCTL) has approved a series of SENAS forms for the submission of course and programme proposals. 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 Registry (E-mail: academicservices@abdn.ac.uk). The forms were extensively revised in 2009 to take account of the outcomes of the University's Curriculum Reform project. The revised forms, which

relate to any curriculum developments for implementation are now entirely web-based and are available at <http://sp.abdn.ac.uk/cref/default.aspx>.

- 3.3.2 Guidance on the completion of SENAS forms is integrated within the forms.

Design and Initial Approval of Courses and Programmes

[Note: Paragraphs 3.3.11-3.3.18 are adapted from, and should be read in conjunction with, the QAA's Quality Code for Higher Education, Section B1: Programme Design and Approval which is available at:- www.qaa.ac.uk]

Responsibility

- 3.3.3 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 programmes). 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. As part of Curriculum Reform, a small number of truly inter-disciplinary courses (i.e. including contribution from two or more Colleges), known as Sixth Century Courses, were introduced. In addition, there are a number of Sustained Study Options which bring together a suite of four sequential courses over levels one and two. Upon successful completion, a student receives endorsement that they have taken this Sustained Study Option on their transcript.
- 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).

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 (QAC).
- 3.3.10 The following should be incorporated into the design and approval of programmes and their constituent 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. Consideration should be given to the location of the programme on the [Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework](#) (and on the University's Framework of Degrees (see [Appendix 1.2](#)).

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 expectation 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.

School Approval

- 3.3.19 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 (or Discipline) committees.
- 3.3.20 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 inter-disciplinary 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

- 3.3.21 Endorsed by the Head of School, proposals are considered at College level, on behalf of the Head of College, by the College of Director of Teaching and Learning for undergraduate courses programmes and by the Head of Graduate School for postgraduate courses and programmes. The College 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. Where the issues are identified, they are referred to the College Teaching and Learning Committee or Graduate School Committee as appropriate. Following College approval, the forms are passed to the QAC for consideration.
- 3.3.22 The QAC is the primary central scrutinising committee and has delegated authority on behalf of the Senate for validation and re-validation of programmes. The QAC is responsible for ensuring that proposals conforms with the University's policies and practices in regard to credit-rating, teaching, learning and assessment practices, and regulatory issues. Through this scrutiny, the QAC 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.
- 3.3.23 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 February, and inclusion in relevant publications (e.g. UCAS Handbook; Prospectuses; University Calendar; Catalogue of Courses) (see [Appendix 3.6](#)). Proposals may be considered out-with the normal planning cycle on an *ad hoc* basis if there is good reason for being unable to meet the 30 November deadline.

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. 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, who are responsible ultimately for approving courses and programme proposals at the School level, and for ensuring that adequate resources are made available;
- the College Director of Teaching & Learning and Head of Graduate School, 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 the Quality Assurance Committee, 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 Quality Assurance Committee, 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 was further enhanced as part of the University's Curriculum Reform whereby with effect from 2010 all undergraduate students³ undertake Enhanced Study Options as part of their degree. Enhanced Study is a Sixth Century Course, a Sustained Study Option or a Disciplinary Breadth Course⁴. 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:-
- approval of individual courses and programmes by the Colleges and the Quality Assurance Committee, 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 including programme revalidation;
 - annual course and programme reviews;
 - insistence on and monitoring of student attendance and course work;

³ Medicine and Dentistry degrees include prescribed Enhanced Study options as part of their degree; students taking a Joint degree, or a major-minor programmes are not required to take the Enhanced Study as the joint nature of their degree provides the necessary breadth.

⁴ www.abdn.ac.uk/thedifference

- 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 a range of written examination scripts for Honours and postgraduate taught students to be double-marked independently and all being 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 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 3.5.19-3.5.23 below also refer. Details of the CAS and Grade Spectrum, and of the University's other assessment and examination policies, are given in [Section 7](#).

The Review of Academic Standards

3.4.9 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 (paragraphs 3.5.30 – 3.5.39 refer). 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 (section 3.3 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.

Annual 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. A flow chart summarising the process and the profoma to be used by Schools to report the outcomes of Course Review can be downloaded from [Appendix 3.7](#).

3.5.3 The stages in the annual course review process are as follows:

- i. Collation of Student Feedback via (a) the Student Course Evaluation Form Exercise (SCEF); (b) Staff-Student Liaison Committees (SSLC) and (c) other in-School methods undertaken to capture student opinion.
- ii. Course Review by the Course Team, incorporating (i) SCEF returns and other student feedback (ii) SSLC meetings, (iii) feedback from External Examiners, (iv) analysis of course data (registrations, withdrawals, pass rates) and (v) feedback from the course team, including class representatives.
- iii. Consideration of Annual Course Reviews by the School Teaching and Learning Committee (TLC) and Head of School
- iv. Analysis of Annual Course Reviews by the College
- v. Consideration of College analyses by the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC). Policy issues arising from the review will be referred to the UCTL.
- vi. Closing of feedback loop, to students and staff, at appropriate junctures throughout the process

3.5.4 Annual Course Review Responsibilities

The **Course Coordinator** is responsible for:

- Stressing the importance of completing the SCEF positively to students and ensuring that the SCEF is made available to students online (www.abdn.ac.uk/scef/) providing adequate time for completion
- Analysing the computer-generated SCEF summary sheets. The **Course Coordinator** is encouraged to skim through the written comments by students as soon as possible to enable the Course Coordinator to gain a quick impression of student opinion, take action if possible or necessary, and report back to students at the earliest opportunity.
- Attending the Staff-Student Liaison Committee (SSLC)⁵
- Convening, where appropriate, a meeting of the Course Team (i.e. those who delivered the course) and class representatives (either separately or with the course team), to discuss the course, feedback from the SSLC, the summary sheets and students' written comments; this should occur as soon as possible after the course has ended.
- Producing the **Annual Course Review** report, to which should be appended the computer-generated summary sheets for the course to the Head of School, via the School Teaching and Learning Committee (or equivalent).

The **Head of School** is responsible for:

- Ensuring Annual Course Reviews, for all courses in the School for which students are registered in the current academic year, are undertaken and that the outcome of such a review, the **Annual Course Review** report, is considered by the School Teaching & Learning Committee (TLC).
- Ensuring that feedback provided by the School TLC and Head of School is provided to (i) the Course Coordinator, (ii) the appropriate Staff-Student Liaison Committee and (iii) the College by the agreed deadline.
- Ensuring that copies of the **Annual Course Review** reports, SCEF summary sheets and feedback are retained.

The **College** is responsible for:

- Analysing their constituent Schools ACRs, ensuring that copies are submitted to QAC by the agreed deadline, and feeding back to Schools as appropriate.

⁵ It is recognised that some SSLC meetings take place before the SCEF exercise is undertaken. In such instances it is expected that feedback from 'early' SSLCs would contribute to the Annual Course Review, and that the Annual Course Review Report would be considered at the next appropriate SSLC meeting.

3.5.5 Timing and Frequency

- The UCTL has agreed that all courses, undergraduate and postgraduate taught, should be reviewed each year.
- Normally, SCEF should be made available online towards the end of a course. Schools are encouraged to ensure that students have appropriate time to complete their survey responses.
- Staff-Student Liaison Committees meet at least once every half-session, and should consider the computer-generated summaries and the Annual Course Review Report from previous half-session. In addition, any comments made by the College or QAC on previous Course Reviews should be submitted to the next SSLC to confirm any actions arising have been taken. Minutes from SSLC meetings should be posted on MyAberdeen for information for other students.
- College analyses of ACRs should be completed and submitted to the QAC by 31 March for 1st half-session courses and by 31 October for 2nd half session courses.

3.5.6 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

3.5.7 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 was redesigned in 2011 when it became electronic. The form 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.

3.5.8 The SCEF is the cornerstone of the University's mechanisms for seeking feedback from students. The SCEF exercise aims to:

- enhance the student's experience of learning and teaching, and encourage self-reflection
- monitor the quality of teaching and learning
- improve the quality of teaching and learning
- ascertain how well a course or programme of study is doing
- identify good practice

3.5.9 The SCEF is only one stage in the overall process. Once the form has been completed, the collated results are analysed, discussed and acted upon.

3.5.10 The SCEF, approved by the UCTL, is divided into two parts, both of which consist of sub-sets of questions:

- Part A is common to all courses and contains a small number of key questions together with space for students' written comments.
- Part B of the SCEF allows for Schools to develop their own questions to meet their individual needs for each course, subject to approval by the relevant Head of School.

- 3.5.11 Students should be asked to complete the form online (www.abdn.ac.uk/scef). Any additional comments can be added to the free text boxes.
- 3.5.12 Normally, SCEF should be made available online towards the end of a course. Course coordinators should ensure students are fully informed of the objectives of the SCEF exercise; the process of course review to give the SCEF exercise context; and how the outcome of the SCEF exercise will be communicated to them.
- 3.5.13 The outcomes of SCEF should be discussed at the next Staff-Student Liaison Committee. There are two types of feedback which should be relayed back to students at SSLCs:
- (i) The results of the SCEF exercise
 - (ii) Any action taken as a result of the survey

In addition, minutes of SSLCs are posted on the MyAberdeen SSLC site. School/course handbooks can also be updated to provide information on course review.

Staff-Student Liaison Committees (SSLC)

- 3.5.14 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.
- 3.5.15 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, dentistry, 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.
- 3.5.16 The QAC's comments on annual course review should be submitted to the next meeting of the SSLC so that the Committee can be satisfied that action has been taken by the School and the University, where necessary.
- 3.5.17 Heads of School are responsible for closing the "feedback loop" to students concerning the outcome of the SCEF exercise and annual course review. As such, Heads of School should ensure that the Minutes of the Staff-Student Liaison Committee meetings are placed on the MyAberdeen SSLC site.
- 3.5.18 Whilst the expected, *and minimum*, methods for Schools to gather student feedback are The SCEF exercise and SSLC, Schools are encouraged to consider different and innovative methods to give students the opportunity to provide feedback. The use of **mid-term questionnaires** can be used to identify any issues which could be acted upon before the course ends. Student **focus groups** and **informal feedback sessions** could be established to allow students to express any concerns or raise issues with the staff throughout the academic year.

External Examiners' Reports

- 3.5.19 External Examiners for undergraduate programmes are required to submit a formal report to the University by 31 October, with postgraduate External Examiner's submitting their annual report by 30 November relating to their activities in the previous academic year. The form is annotated by an officer in the Registry to highlight any issues raised by an External Examiner that require attention and/or aspects of good practice. It is then copied to the Convener of the University Committee on Teaching and Learning, and to the relevant College via the Assistant College Registrar (Teaching & Learning), the Head of School and the Convener of the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC). The QAC also inform Assistant College Registrars of any areas of concern that have not hitherto been highlighted for action.
- 3.5.20 Heads of Schools' are asked to comment 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.
- 3.5.21 Colleges submit a report to the Quality Assurance Committee, outlining how the Schools within the College have responded to External Examiners' comments. Policy issues raised by an External Examiner are referred by the QAC to the UCTL.
- 3.5.22 The QAC is 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.
- 3.5.23 Details on the role of External Examiners for taught courses and programmes are provided in [Section 9](#).

Annual Programme Review

- 3.5.24 Formal annual programme review procedures were introduced in August 2000, and revised during academic year 2012/13 for implementation in December 2013. Programme reviews can be undertaken for an individual programme, or a group of cognate programmes, as considered most appropriate by the School. Joint degrees should be considered by the 'parent' School, i.e. the School first-named in the degree title.
- 3.5.25 The aim of Annual Programme Review is in accordance with the QAA Quality Code for assuring and enhancing academic quality: programme monitoring and review December 2011⁶, and as such is to examine the effectiveness of our programmes:
- to ensure that programmes remain current and valid in light of developing knowledge in the discipline, and practice in its application
 - to evaluate the extent to which the intended learning outcomes are being attained by students
 - to evaluate the continuing effectiveness of the curriculum and of assessment in relation to the intended learning outcomes
 - to ensure that recommendations for appropriate actions are followed up to remedy any identified shortcomings and
 - to monitor and review the student experience

⁶ <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/quality-code-B8.aspx>

- 3.5.26 The stages in the Annual Programme Review process are as follows:
- i. Preparation of Annual Programme Review (**APRs**) by the Programme Team, following consideration of: (a) Annual Course Reviews for constituent courses (see paragraphs 3.5.2-3.5.6), (b) feedback from External Examiners, (c) feedback from Professional and Statutory Bodies (where applicable, (c) feedback from Programme Advisory Boards (PABs), or equivalent (d) analysis of programme data (registrations, withdrawals, awards and completion rates (PGT only) and (e) feedback from the programme team and student representatives.
 - ii. Preparation of School Action Plans (**SAPs**) by the Head of School following consideration of: (a) Annual Programme Reviews and (b) analysis of programme data (National Student Survey (NSS) and Institutional Student Surveys (ISS) outcomes, Postgraduate Taught Student Experience Survey (PTES), retention rates and Destination of Leavers (DLHE) measures) and other in-School methods undertaken to capture student opinion).
 - iii. Consideration of Annual Programme Reviews and School Action Plans by the College Director of Teaching and Learning (for undergraduate programmes) and the College and Head of Graduate School (for postgraduate taught programmes)
 - iv. Consideration of Annual Programme Reviews and School Action Plans by the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) and the University Committee for Teaching and Learning (UCTL)
 - v. Closing of feedback loop, to students and staff, at appropriate junctures throughout the process
- 3.5.27 The proformas to be used by Schools to report the outcomes of Programme Review can be downloaded from [www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/teaching/aqh/appendix3x13.pdf].
- 3.5.28 Schools are required to complete an Annual Programme Review for each of their main programme groupings. School Action Plans must be agreed with, and signed, by the College Director for Learning & Teaching and Head of Graduate School, and should be submitted to the Quality Assurance Committee by **31 January**. Internal deadlines for the submission of Annual Programme Reviews to the Head of School, and of School Action Plans to the College, are to be agreed within the School and College respectively.
- 3.5.29 Colleges are responsible for the submission of the School Action Plans (to which the Annual Programme Reviews for the School's constituent programmes are to be appended) to the Quality Assurance Committee **by 31 January**.

Other Forms of Feedback

- 3.5.29 The above quality control mechanisms are complemented by feedback from employers, from graduates, and from professional bodies.
- 3.5.30 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. Following Curriculum Reform all programmes, or groups of programmes, have established **Programme Advisory Boards** to inform programme development. These groups include employer and alumni representation to ensure programme relevance in an external context.
- 3.5.31 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, together with graduate involvement in programme advisory groups, may therefore be obtained in this manner.

Internal Teaching Reviews

- 3.5.30 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, and were further revised in 2009 to take account of changes required by SFC. Further revisions were made in 2010 to take account of the implementation of the University's reformed curriculum (CRef). Following the development of new annual course and programme review procedures, it has been agreed to undertake a comprehensive review of Internal Teaching Review (including programme revalidation) in the Spring of 2014.
- 3.5.33 The aims of an Internal Teaching Review are:
- to provide a formal opportunity for a School 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 out-with 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;
 - to re-validate degree programmes for continued delivery.
- 3.5.34 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 Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) of the Head of School's and Head of College's response to the Panel's recommendations;
 - consideration, by the QAC, of the Head of School's progress report on implementation of the recommendations one year following the QAC's consideration of the Panel's Report.
- 3.5.35 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: Staff Training and Educational Development Proforma](#)

- [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](#)

3.5.36 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.

3.5.37 Formal **programme revalidation** procedures were integrated with the Internal Teaching Review Process in August 2000, following internal consideration of the QAA's section of its Code of Practice on Programme Approval, Monitoring and Review.

3.5.38 The aims of Programme Revalidation 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.

3.5.39 The **Programme Revalidation** procedures are detailed in [Appendix 3.8](#) and [Annex B](#). In line with QAA requirements for Subject Review, programme review and, hence, programme revalidation, are undertaken 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.

3.6 Quality Enhancement

Learning from Internal and External Reports and Publications

3.6.1 Enhancement-led Institutional Review, 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.

3.6.2 Relevant publications produced by the various "quality" agencies (e.g. QAA, Quality Enhancement Themes, Universities UK, Universities Scotland) 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.

- 3.6.3 In May 2009, as part of the University's Curriculum Reform project, the University Committee on Teaching and Learning approved an Institutional Strategy for the Identification and Dissemination of Good Practice in Learning and Teaching (Appendix 3.12). The Strategy aims 'to raise awareness, improve understanding and stimulate activity with the overall purpose of enhancing teaching and learning'. The Strategy details various channels for dissemination within the University and gives details of the Institutional commitments in regard to dissemination of good practice highlighted through Course and Programme Review (see 3.3 above), Internal Teaching Review (3.5.21-3.5.25 above), External Examiner reports (3.5.10-3.5.14 above), external accreditation reports and other relevant publications.

Enhancement-led Institutional Review

- 3.6.4 Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR), which forms part of SFC'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 2.4](#).

External Reference Points

- 3.6.5 As indicated in [sub-section 2.2](#), the QAA, to support its 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;
- **The UK Quality Code for Higher Education** (the **Quality Code**) sets out the **Expectations** that all providers of UK higher education are required to meet.;
- the **Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland** (and a complementary framework for HE qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland).

- 3.6.6 The QAA's *Quality Code for Higher Education* is made up of the following published can be accessed at www.qaa.ac.uk

Part A: Setting and maintaining threshold academic standards

- A1: The national level
- A2: The subject and qualification level
- A3: The programme level
- A4: Approval and review
- A5: Externality
- A6: Assessment of achievement of learning outcomes

Part B: Assuring and enhancing academic quality

- B1: Programme design and approval
- B2: Admissions
- B3: Learning and teaching
- B4: Student support, learning resources and careers education, information, advice and guidance
- B5: Student engagement
- B6: Assessment of students and accreditation of prior learning
- B7: External examining
- B8: Programme monitoring and review
- B9: Complaints and appeals
- B10: Management of collaborative arrangements
- B11: Postgraduate research programmes

Part C: Information about higher education provision.

- 3.6.7 The Subject Benchmark Statements are primarily for use at the School level, to inform Schools in the review of their programmes.
- 3.6.8 The University keeps under review its policies and procedures to ensure that they align with the various sections of the QAA's *Quality Code for Higher Education* and the Qualifications Framework

University Committee on Teaching and Learning

- 3.6.10 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 groups to advise the Committee on relevant issues in regard to teaching and learning.

Learning & Teaching Operational Plan

- 3.6.12 The Learning & Teaching (L&T) Operational Plan (www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/documents/Operational_Plan_L_and_T_Update_July_13.pdf) is based upon the learning and teaching objectives within the Strategic Plan, and identifies the actions to be undertaken to achieve these objectives. The L&T operational plan is reviewed and updated annually, with progress towards achievement of its objectives reported to the first meeting of UCTL each academic year. The Plan demonstrates clearly the strategic approach we have to enhancing the student learning experience.

3.7 Staff Recruitment and Development

- 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.
- 3.7.5 Full information relating to the University's recruitment and selection procedures is available online at: www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/working-here/about-hr-994.php

Centre for Academic Development

- 3.7.6 The [Centre for Academic Development](#), established in 2013, brought together the Centre for Learning and Teaching with the Researcher Development Team to provide a single point of contact for staff seeking to further develop their teaching, learning and research practice within an integrated structure. The Centre also works with students to develop their academic skills. Within the Centre the eLearning team support eLearning activities and developments across the University, whilst the Student Learning Service works with students to develop their academic skills. The Educational Development Team deliver a range of accredited programmes and the Researcher Development Team deliver training, support and resources to support research excellence and personal and professional growth/progression. Staff from the Centre are also involved in a range of projects, both within the University and externally.
- 3.7.7 The University is committed to ensuring that all those who support student learning are provided with adequate opportunities to undertake structured development opportunities. With this in mind, the Centre offers a range of HEA [accredited programmes](#), courses for staff who are new to teaching, and a suite of workshops for all staff to develop their teaching and learning practices.

Support for eLearning

- 3.7.15 Centre for Academic Development staff provide support and training in the use of eLearning for teaching. Support includes generic workshops and demonstrations, tailored training for Schools and course teams, one-to-one consultation, advice on online course design and support for e-assessment. The service also includes support for pilot projects (e.g. video in teaching, web conferencing), investigation and evaluation of the software available for specific teaching requirements and support for new programme start-up. Applications supported include MyAberdeen (the institutional VLE), Question Mark perception for e-assessment, PRS (electronic voting systems), interactive lectern and whiteboard software and TurnitinUK (plagiarism avoidance software).

Researcher Development

- 3.7.16 The Researcher Development Unit supports personal, professional and career development of postgraduate research students and research staff at all stages of their career. The Researcher Development unit works closely with Colleges and the Public Engagement with

Research Unit and supports a progressive strategy for development closely coupled to follow through activities.

Annual Learning & Teaching Symposium

- 3.7.17 The Centre for Academic Development organises an annual Learning & Teaching Symposium (including a Best Practice Fair). This is a major, Institution-wide event aimed at both highlighting national and international good practice in learning & teaching, and also at celebrating the work of staff from across the University.

Annual Teaching Fellows' Symposium

- 3.7.18 The Centre for Academic Development organises an annual event aimed specifically at Teaching Fellows. The event brings together Teaching Fellows from across the University, providing an opportunity both to share good practice in learning & teaching, and to hear from nationally recognised experts in the field.

Appraisal and Promotion Procedures

- 3.7.19 The University has an appraisal system for all categories of staff which is undertaken annually. Full details are available online at: www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/working-here/about-hr-994.php
- 3.7.20 The University runs an annual Promotion & Contribution Award Exercise. The procedures for promotion incorporate the HERA Framework Evaluation elements and have been developed and agreed following consultation with the University's recognized Trade Unions. As part of the implementation of the Framework Agreement, a number of generic role profiles for Academic, Research and Teaching staff were agreed at national level. The University has adopted the use of these National Academic Role Profiles.

Full details relating to the Promotion & Contribution Award Exercise are available online at: www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/working-here/pay-promotions-and-benefits-948.php

Relief Teaching

- 3.7.20 Occasionally, relief teachers are appointed on a fixed-term basis. The University Committee on Teaching and Learning (UCTL) 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 Quality Assurance 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.