

Strategy for Enhancement and Assurance of the Quality of Learning, Teaching and Assessment, 2013-21

The primary aims of the College's Quality Assurance and Enhancement Strategy are:

- to enhance the quality of the student learning experience, through using quality management processes to identify areas for enhancement;
- to provide assurance that the quality and standards of its courses are appropriate, and to ensure that timely and effective action is taken where they are at risk.

Whilst some activities may be focused either primarily on assurance or enhancement, every aspect of the College's quality management structure will serve both purposes. The result will be that the College is recognised internationally for the irreproachable standards of its awards, and for the outstanding quality of the student learning experience.

In the lifetime of this Strategy we will:

- embed quality management processes so that enhancement activity permeates day-to-day academic practice;
- seek to ensure that the College responds to every significant issue raised by stakeholders, particularly students;
- adopt a more risk-based approach that takes into account the significance of different aspects of the student learning experience.

Quality is central to this Strategy. We will develop our quality management processes so that quality as defined, perceived and experienced by staff, students and other stakeholders all carry substantial weight. We will seek, at all times, to ensure that quality assurance and enhancement are evidence-based.

This Strategy does not stand alone, but should be read in the context of the College's overall Strategic Plan 2014-21 and other linked strategies, in particular the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy which will set out the deliberate steps that the College plans to take to enhance the quality of the student learning experience.

Operational Objectives

Over the lifetime of this Strategy we will seek to:

- 1) amplify the impact of student engagement in quality enhancement;
- 2) streamline our quality management processes, moving them on-line wherever this is prudent;
- 3) become more effective in "closing the loop" on quality assurance and enhancement actions.

Amplify the impact of student engagement in quality enhancement

Objectives

- i. to work in partnership with students to enhance their learning experience;
- ii. to enable and empower students to voice their opinions and provide feedback on their learning experience;
- iii. to ensure high levels of student satisfaction.

Background

All students, undergraduate and postgraduate, whether studying on campus or at a distance, have a right to express their views about their learning experience, for those views to be listened to, and for the College to respond where appropriate. Most students engage in this process to some extent, but we need to engage those who do not, such as those who score us badly in the National Student Survey without having first raised their issues internally when given the opportunity. We need to find out why some students do not engage, by asking them.

We will continue to gather student views on their learning experience through a range of “traditional” methods including questionnaire surveys; input to committees; participation in Periodic Reviews; student feedback fora; liaison with SU representatives; informal feedback through the tutorial systems.

The most appropriate methods of gathering students’ views may vary from course to course, and we should adopt a more bespoke approach when this would yield better results.

We will strive to improve response rates to surveys from our graduates and from their employers, both of whom who can offer valuable insights on the quality and relevance of our courses.

It is important that we manage students’ expectations more effectively. There are many reasons why it is impossible to respond positively to every student request: different students’ views may diverge; there will be resource constraints; and the informed judgement of staff may disagree with the students’ requests. However, irrespective of the outcome, students’ views must be heard, and they should be informed of the outcome.

Actions

We will:

- i. work in partnership with students and the Students’ Union to review and refine the ways in which we gather input from students, graduates and employers;
- ii. continue to develop student survey mechanisms, such as on-line systems, with which students can engage easily;
- iii. monitor that there are effective mechanisms to gather students’ evaluations of support services that contribute to their learning experience;
- iv. develop a simpler system to enable students to register minor complaints;
- v. introduce a “999” system to respond rapidly to urgent and important issues, e.g. construction works causing unplanned disruption to teaching;
- vi. refine the training and continuing support for student representatives, enhance their visibility, and help to maximise their effectiveness;

- vii. educate all students more effectively on the evaluation processes available to them, promoting opportunities for their involvement, and consider further incentivising students to participate in them;
- viii. ensure there is effective student involvement in all relevant quality management processes, including Periodic Review and External Examining.

Streamline our quality management processes, moving them on-line wherever this is prudent.

Objectives

- i. to operate a suite of quality management processes that effectively but economically assure quality and standards, covering the full life-cycles of courses and students;
- ii. to ensure that our processes are fit for purpose, and reflect contemporary technology and methods of working;
- iii. to satisfy the accreditation requirements of the RCVS, AVMA, EAEVE, HEA, the Society of Biology, and any other appropriate professional statutory or regulatory body;
- iv. to operate our processes such that they maximise enhancement of the student learning experience;
- v. to ensure effort is focussed on issues which are fundamental to the maintenance of academic standards and/or key to the enhancement of the student learning experience.

Background

The College sets challenging academic standards, which are essential if our graduates are to meet the demands of the professions that they enter, and the College's awards are to continue to have international currency. It is a prerequisite of our processes that they enable us to set, monitor and maintain standards.

We should ensure that the costs and benefits of quality management processes are in balance, minimising the demands on both administrative and academic staff, and reducing direct costs.

We have made a start on streamlining our processes and where appropriate moving them on-line. We should continue with this so that we have a set of essential processes that enable us to assure standards, and to enhance and assure quality, at minimum cost. By streamlining time-intensive processes, and making them fit well with other academic processes rather than possibly duplicating them, we will encourage staff to engage with them more productively.

Moving processes on-line will make it possible to standardise data and improve its quality, facilitate future retrieval, and improve accessibility for users. It should facilitate pre-population of documents such as annual reports with data, and the use of automated reminders linked to clear deadlines.

We need to ensure there is a balance between the time spent gathering, analysing and collating quality management data, and the time spent using it to enhance provision. We should ensure that we gather only as much data as we need to assure standards and threshold quality, and as we can use effectively for enhancement.

There may be scope for making the assurance-focused parts of our processes more risk-based, building-in stages to identify potential risks to standards or quality and focusing greater resource on these - e.g. collaborative courses, or areas where the consequences of any failure would be particularly severe.

Although consistency of processes is desirable, we should be open to adopting different approaches for different courses where this will meet our aims more effectively.

The College's academic committees are conscientious in overseeing our quality management processes, but often face a heavy volume of work. We should develop our processes so that the committees can function more effectively.

Actions

We will

- i. review our quality management processes regularly, to ensure they remain fit for purpose;
- ii. move processes on-line where this will improve their effectiveness (including annual quality improvement reports, student, graduate and employer surveys, External Examiner reports, nomination of curriculum managers and External Examiners, and the updating of Award & Assessment Regulations and Programme Specifications).
- iii. make our processes easier to access and to understand, for academic and non-academic staff, curriculum managers, and students;
- iv. place greater emphasis on the use of enhancement-focused action plans as the primary output from our quality management processes, whilst trying to ensure there is no unnecessary overlap or inconsistency between them;
- v. ensure that our quality management processes are implemented robustly in our collaborative provision;
- vi. consider whether social media could play a constructive part in our processes;
- vii. tackle the challenge of committee overload, e.g. through nominating readers to take the lead on agreed agenda items.

Become more effective in “closing the loop” on quality assurance and enhancement actions.

Objectives

- i. to ensure that necessary actions are agreed, taken in a timely manner, and that stakeholders, particularly students, are informed whether and what action has been taken;
- ii. to meet the expectations of QAA and HEFCE in respect of public information.

Background

All our quality management processes generate actions. These should be clearly defined, with deadlines for action to be taken, and the responsible staff member identified. Those who may want to know, primarily students but sometimes staff, External Examiners or other stakeholders, should be informed what action is intended. We need to monitor that action is indeed taken, and to be particularly vigilant where any issues recur.

We should ensure that students' views have been considered and responded to appropriately, even where the data generated by our processes is of a qualitative nature e.g. open comments from surveys, discussions at student forums.

It is not sufficient to simply up-load quality data to the intranet or website. We need to make the results visible and accessible, particularly to students. We have made significant progress with 'You Said...We Did' but much more can and should be done. There are many avenues that could be used more effectively to give feedback to students on enhancement actions that have been agreed or taken in response to their input: Learn (the colleges Virtual Learning Environment); the screens in public areas; promotional campaigns; announcements by staff or student representatives in lectures; and many more.

We need to have a conversation with our students about what they want to know, and how they want to be informed. We should give them the information they want, not what we think they should want; we should use media with which students are engaged.

Closing the loop also implies ensuring that the College makes public an agreed set of information relating to quality and standards. This is necessary in order to meet the requirements of the College's Publication Scheme, and the expectations of QAA and HEFCE, but we may wish to go further.

Actions

- i. we will ensure that all our quality management processes have robust mechanisms for monitoring that enhancement actions have been taken effectively;
- ii. we will explore new and improved routes for informing students, and other stakeholders, how we respond to their feedback, including when specific action has been agreed or taken;
- iii. we will implement a comprehensive scheme for making information on quality and standards openly accessible.

Implementation and Monitoring

- i. TQC will identify, for approval by Academic Board, a set of Key Performance Indicators against which progress can be monitored;
- ii. An annual implementation plan will be approved via TQC and Academic Board during the Spring cycle of meetings at the end of the preceding academic year;

- iii. Each Autumn an annual report will be made to TQC, and thence to the Academic Board, detailing the progress made towards meeting the KPIs and the broader strategic objectives.

Quality Assurance & Enhancement Strategy

KPIs

Student Engagement

1. Percentage of available student representative positions filled
2. Percentage of reps attending training events
3. Percentage of reps attending catch-up/social events
4. Attendance rates of reps at committee meetings
5. Number of items on which comments are made by students at committee meetings
6. Response rates to student evaluation surveys
7. Response rates to graduate surveys
8. Student attendance at feedback events, e.g. rotation forums
9. Response rates on NSS, PTES and PRES

Quality Management Processes

1. Quality management cycles (Annual Quality Improvement Reports, External Examiner reporting) completed on time
2. Percentage of External Examiner responses, Strand Reviews, Module Reviews and AQI Reports submitted on time
3. Number of outstanding External Examiner nominations at start of academic year
4. Percentage of new External Examiners attending INSET Day
5. Accreditation status of courses
6. Outcome of QAA HER
7. Memoranda of Agreement in place for all collaborative provision

Closing the Loop

1. Number of YSWD entries
2. Percentage of student module/strand surveys with low scores not receiving response through module/strand review
3. Percentage of action points from each committee meeting with no response
4. Scores on NSS, PTES and PRES

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