2A: Introduction to the University’s policies and regulations for managing academic quality and safeguarding academic standards

Background, scope and application

1. Section 2 of the Academic Handbook contains the University’s policies and regulations for the management of academic quality and the safeguarding of academic standards.

2. Use of the Academic Handbook throughout the University ensures that there is a clear and shared understanding of the policies and regulations.

3. Sections of the Handbook are reviewed regularly. The Committee responsible for oversight and approval of each section is set out in the contents page along with the date of approval of the current version.

4. The principles and regulations set out in the policies in Section 2 encapsulate how all learning related provision offered by the University should be designed, delivered, reviewed and enhanced. Processes, procedures and guidance on how they should be implemented are set out in Section 4. They should be appropriately applied in all cases except where the ISO 9001 system is already formally in place for certain professional courses.

Terminology - standards and quality

5. In the past, terms such as standards and quality have been used as though they were interchangeable. It is important to be clear about terminology in a document such as this.

Standards

6. Academic standards involve judgements about student attainment and are expressed by the grades/marks awarded. Safeguarding academic standards involves:

i. making explicit the expectations of what should be achieved by students, and

ii. assessing the learning achieved by students, using fair, rigorous and transparent means and drawing on the expertise and objectivity of internal and external examiners.
Quality

7. The University is responsible for the quality of its educational provision and the learning opportunities it provides to enable students to achieve the standards required for its awards.

8. The term quality management includes arrangements for quality control, quality assurance and quality enhancement. Such arrangements take into account and are aligned with the QAA’s UK Quality Code for Higher Education and the European Standards and Guidelines.

9. Quality control refers to the day to day responsibility for the quality of academic provision which rests with schools, Quality Management and the Policy, Governance and Information service and is exercised formally through the University’s academic committees.

10. Quality assurance refers to the systems, policies and regulations in place which are designed to ensure that the learning opportunities available to students are appropriate, transparent and consistent both within the University and those elsewhere in the higher education sector and that the standards of University awards are safeguarded.

11. Quality enhancement refers to planned systematic improvements to the quality of learning opportunities through improvements to provision, systems and processes.

Responsibility

12. Formal responsibility for the academic standards of taught and research degree awards made by the University is a corporate one and is exercised by Academic Board acting through its committees, most notably the Learning, Teaching and Student Achievement Committee and the Research Degrees Committee. Academic Board is responsible for the effectiveness of arrangements for safeguarding the academic standards and enhancing the quality of the University’s taught and research degrees provision.

Externality

13. The principle of external peer review is well established within the University and applies at all levels. This contributes significantly to ensuring that the University’s academic work and processes for safeguarding the standards of the awards are responsive to national trends and the requirements of the Office for Students and its designated quality body the Quality Assurance Agency. Accordingly, professionals from other disciplines within the University and external peers are involved in course and module approval and revalidations and other quality assurance processes. In addition, reports from external examiners are received, formally considered and acted upon. This ensures the existence of a self-critical academic community, which can be both informed by, and benefit from, the work of academic and professional colleagues from within and beyond the University.