QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN THE OPEN UNIVERSITY

The content and links in this fact sheet are correct as of the date of last update shown. A full review of the factsheet series is planned in 2021.

FACT SHEET 3: INTERNAL REVIEW

Overview

1 Open University taught modules and qualifications managed by Boards of Studies are subject to review processes throughout their life to ensure that the high quality of academic provision and the student learning experience is maintained or improved and that any issues are identified and addressed quickly. Quantitative information about performance for the Open University and all other UK Universities is published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency.

2 The Academic Quality & Governance Committee is responsible to the Senate for assuring the effectiveness of the University’s arrangements for managing academic quality and standards, for overseeing the University’s engagement with external quality assessment and assuring the effectiveness of academic governance.

3 The University’s arrangements for internal review address the UK Quality Code.

4 Internal review is supported by a range of processes, which are undertaken in accordance with policy and strategy agreed at University level, including:

- monitoring of student recruitment, retention, performance and progress;
- monitoring of student satisfaction with qualifications, modules and services;
- input from external assessors (modules in development), external examiners (modules in presentation) external advisers/external qualification assessors (qualifications in production) and external advisers (qualifications in presentation);
- feedback from academic staff concerned with development and delivery of academic provision;
- student involvement and engagement.

Periodic Quality Review

5 The University carries out periodic reviews of all its taught qualifications whether delivered directly to its student body or through partnership. The review process is carried out over a 6-year cycle. The key features of this peer review activity are:

- a panel is appointed to undertake the review and comprises two internal academic members of staff, an external academic and a representative from the University’s student body;
- the review follows a standard procedure and includes a report based on self-evaluation of the subject area.

6 The review process focusses on student satisfaction, performance and achievement in qualifications (as distinct from modules) and the aims and objectives are to:

---

1 Links to external and internal websites were checked in March 2020. Some web links referred to in this document may be intranet based and so restricted to Open University staff.
• lead to quality enhancement through an independent critical evaluation of the curriculum and so make a positive contribution to quality assurance within the University;
• demonstrate the effective and ongoing management of the quality and standards of qualifications, the management of learning opportunities and the reliability of information.

7 The findings from periodic quality review are reported to the relevant Boards of Studies and Teaching Committee (faculty body) and considered at institutional level by the Academic Quality & Governance Committee. The outcomes are published internally and discussed by the Directors of Teaching forum as a way of sharing best practice and learning from any recommendations for improvement. An action plan is prepared to address recommendations for improvement within 2-3 months of the review and a report on progress/completion of planned actions is reviewed a year later. Recommendations may be directed to other parts of the University or at institutional level and these too are addressed in the action plan and progress report by relevant units.

Annual Board of Studies Review

8 The terms of reference for Boards of Studies include responsibility for the quality of the qualifications in their remit. Each Board of Studies is asked to prepare an annual Quality Monitoring and Enhancement (QME) report for submission to their faculty and to the University, based on the recent performance of the undergraduate and taught postgraduate modules and qualifications for which the Board of Studies is responsible, either delivered directly or via partnerships.

9 The QME report comments on areas ranging from the currency of the modules in each qualification through to how each qualification relates to external reference points such as National Qualifications Frameworks and Subject Benchmark Statements\(^2\) and relevance to Professional and Statutory and Regulatory Bodies. Boards of Studies are also encouraged to identify any features of each qualification, such as its teaching and learning strategy, which they would like to share with others.

10 Academic staff refer to a variety of information when completing the QME report including: student registrations for each qualification and its compulsory and core modules; the number of students claiming qualifications and the time taken to complete the qualification; distribution of award classifications for students that have completed qualifications; student pass rates; student demographics; student feedback captured via surveys such as the University’s Student Experience on a Module Survey (SEaM) and the National Student Survey (NSS).

11 Boards of Studies also consider an annual report submitted by their external adviser who comments on the currency and validity of qualifications comparable to those in other institutions through to classification profiles of students who have achieved qualifications.

12 Boards of Studies monitor the external environment with particular regard to the recognition of qualifications by external bodies, the offerings of other higher education institutions in the subject area of the qualification, including student enrolments, and governmental policy. They keep under review the Qualification Specification of each qualification for which they are responsible, including the validity, relevance and lifespan of the qualification and its constituent strands and modules, recommending changes where appropriate. These activities, and actions arising, are reported in their QME report.

13 Completed QME reports are considered by a Peer Review Group who report on outcomes to the faculties. Findings from the process are submitted to the Qualifications and Assessment

\(^2\) published by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (www.qaa.ac.uk) and describes what can be expected of graduates in different subject areas
Committee in terms of academic standards, and the Student Experience Committee in relation to the quality of the student learning experience. The outcomes from QME can lead to changes in institutional processes and procedures and recommendations made to Boards of Studies for improving the student experience or for sharing best practice.

**Module level review**

14 Modules are subject to annual monitoring, which is reported back to the University via the QME process. They are also subject to a more intensive review process twice during their lives - module post launch review and module lifecycle review - and exception reporting if data indicates cause for concern or exceptional performance. These reviews and outcomes of the reviews are reported back to the University via the QME process. The detail of each type of module review is given in more detail below.

15 **Module post launch review:** After first presentation, post-launch review applies to both new and remake modules and fulfils the following functions:

- A business review to check whether the original market assumptions, strategic aims and the costing outlined at the previous stage-gates were reasonably accurate and whether actual performance justifies the continuation of the module or pack as planned.
- A quality assurance process using the initial feedback and performance data on the first presentation to evaluate the effectiveness of the module in fulfilling its learning outcomes (including workload) and retaining students.

16 **Module lifecycle review:** Lifecycle review applies to all modules and packs and is normally held every five years or at a point in the module life when a decision needs to be made about the module life or whether to invest resource in updating the module. This stage combines:

- A business review to check whether the module is continuing to attract students, continues to deliver anticipated strategic fit, and is maintaining a reasonable level of contribution.
- A quality assurance check using evidence gathered during previous presentations to evaluate performance in relation to its academic currency, effectiveness in fulfilling its learning outcomes (including workload) and student retention and performance.

17 **Regular module review:** Modules not completing one of the above reviews carry out a regular module review. This focuses on student retention, performance and completion, and student feedback. If particular aspects of a module are of concern, Boards of Studies may direct module teams to focus on these areas of module performance and report/record conclusions and actions on the review template.

18 The initial module life and presentation pattern is agreed at approval stage. The module life initially approved may subsequently be reviewed, or, under certain circumstances, the module may be withdrawn before the completion of its planned period of presentation. Curtailing the expected life of a module requires approval by the relevant faculty. The decision must only be taken after careful consideration of the options available to students who might have intended to study it as part of a qualification.

19 An extension to the life of a module is signalled as early as possible in the faculty's annual forward module plans. An extension to the life of a module is considered by a module life review panel, convened by the faculty, and which submits a proposal to faculty committee on extending or shortening the agreed module life.

**Review of non-module or qualification based services to students**

20 Services which are non-module specific are reviewed in various ways including:
At institutional level - The unit planning process incorporates elements of review against plans and targets. Unit Strategy Statements draw upon, and feed into the University’s strategic priorities, which are also reviewed annually.

Unit internal review processes - Units with responsibilities for non-academic student services undertake their own internal reviews. Reports are focussed around key performance indicators which help identify where specific activity is needed.

Through module/programme review - The review process at module and qualification level involves consideration of the student experience, and the findings which relate to particular aspects e.g. module advice, tutorial support, computing support, timely and accurate provision of information and materials. Periodic Quality Review considers the role of Academic Services, Marketing, Library Services and so on, in the student learning experience. Aspects are also aggregated at activity level and considered by appropriate committees.

Annual monitoring of curriculum partnerships and validated provision

21 Annual review of curriculum partnerships and validated provision is considered by the Curriculum Partnerships Committee.

Review and enhancement of research degrees

22 Research degree standards are subject to rigorous approval processes at initial registration, degree registration and examination.

23 The Research Degrees Committee is responsible to the Research Committee for all policy, regulatory, and procedural matters relating to research degrees and higher doctorates. The responsibility to ensure that the process is satisfactorily completed rests with the Head of School. The review processes are designed to identify matters which may be causing issues for the student, the supervisors and the discipline, as well as assuring that a satisfactory standard of progress is being achieved. The Research Degrees Committee periodically reviews aspects of policy and procedure. In addition, the directly supported research degree programme has an annual programme monitoring process which reports to the Research Degrees Committee.

Student feedback via Module Survey

24 The Student Experience on a Module (SEaM) Survey is the main instrument used to monitor and evaluate the student experience of teaching and learning on taught modules in the University. The SEaM survey comprises three themed sets of questions which cover areas such as teaching, learning & assessment and tutorial support. The University uses key performance indicator questions (where students are asked to rate an aspect of the overall module experience) to support module and qualification teams in identifying undergraduate and taught postgraduate modules which are performing particularly well and those that are not performing as well as expected. Key performance indicator summary data for the OU overall and by level is provided in addition to individual results for each module.

25 Data tables of the results of the key performance indicator questions for individual modules are published on the enquirer website together with module team responses to any issues raised by students through the survey.

Student feedback via Qualification Surveys

26 Students views on their experience studying a qualification(s) with the OU is given through external surveys, particularly the National Student Survey (NSS), the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES), the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) and the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey. The outcomes of the DLHE and
NSS surveys are available from https://discoveruni.gov.uk/. This data is considered at qualification level as part of the AQR process. The you said – we did website outlines how the institution has responded to NSS feedback.

Internal student surveys

University-wide issues such as the outcomes of university study for graduates, the costs of OU study and access to technology require special surveys at appropriate times. There is a main programme of internal surveys conducted at University-wide level e.g. student withdrawal survey, early qualification experience survey, careers survey. These surveys are all seen by the Student Research Project Panel (SRPP) before they are launched.

Annual Quality Report

The findings from reviews of taught, collaborative, validation and research provision, and how the outcomes have been addressed, form important evidence about the effectiveness of the management of academic quality and standards in the University. This evidence together with other information, such as how the institution has addressed its own agreed measures and targets to support its strategic plan, is reflected in an Annual Quality Report submitted to the Senate and Council. Council use the report to submit statements of assurance to the Office for Students and Scottish Funding Council.