About the Framework

The Academic Policy and Quality Framework (‘The Framework’) sets out the University’s mechanisms for assuring and enhancing the quality of its academic provision, leading to the outcomes expected by the Office for Students and the Quality Assurance Agency. The Framework includes many of the elements that have formed a basis for the University’s quality assurance for many years, along with more recent developments. The Framework is the means by which this variety of mechanisms is articulated.

The Framework is presented as three interrelated elements. At the centre of these elements is oversight by University Committees.
Legislation

The University’s Legislation addresses matters of institutional governance and organisation. As defined in the University Statutes, University Legislation consists of the Charter, Statutes, Ordinances, Regulations and Codes of Practice of the University. All members of staff and students are subject to the Legislation.

Whilst the Charter and Statutes are at the top of this hierarchy and address matters of institutional governance and organisation, most students and staff are affected directly only by Ordinances, Regulations and Codes of Practice, which contain principles and standards designed to control or govern conduct, or provide direction.

Ordinances
The Ordinances provide more detail on the exercise of powers than in the Statutes. They distribute the authority of Council to committees and to execute officers, and control use of that authority. They contain provisions regarding the Senate, the University Executive Board, College Boards, and the Court, and establish the main elements of the University’s organisational structure. Ordinances may be amended or augmented by the University Council. [https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/university/governance/Legislation/index.aspx](https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/university/governance/Legislation/index.aspx)

Regulations
The Regulations contain principles and standards designed to control or govern conduct or provide direction at a more detailed level than Ordinances. Sections 1-4 and section 9 may be amended or augmented by the Council. Authority to amend or augment sections 5-8 (the academic and student-related Regulation) has been delegated to the Senate. Expectations such as the moderation of marks, rules for calculation of degree classification, and the structure of different programme types are set out in Regulations. [https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/registry/legislation/regulations/index.aspx](https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/registry/legislation/regulations/index.aspx)

Codes of Practice, Policies and Guidance
Supplementing the Regulations, there are a number of academic and academic-related Codes of Practice, Policies and Guidance documents. These set out the procedures to be followed in specific areas. Expectations such as those relating to student attendance, supervising students, and providing academic support are set out in the Codes of Practice, Policies and Guidance. [https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/registry/legislation/codesofpractice/index.aspx](https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/registry/legislation/codesofpractice/index.aspx)
The University employs a number of procedures to assure the quality of our educational provision on an ongoing basis.

Programme and Module Approval Procedures
The University’s programme and module approval procedures ensure that the appropriate School, College and University approval is granted for curriculum developments. The procedures are risk-based in order that (for example) minimal approval is sought for minor amendments at module level, whereas University-level approval is required for the creation of a new programme. https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/registry/policy/programmemodule/index.aspx

Collaborative Provision Procedures
Collaborative Provision procedures ensure that the University maintains effective oversight of its collaborative arrangements. The procedures also ensure oversight of the development and operation of programmes delivered with collaborating organisations: https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/registry/policy/collaborative/index.aspx

External Examiner System (Taught Provision)
External examiners (taught provision) are appointed to provide the University with impartial and independent advice and informed comment on the institution’s academic standards and student achievement in relation to those standards, through oversight of the assessment process at the module and programme/award level. All University programmes of study, and modules therein, which lead to an award of credit at foundation, undergraduate or postgraduate taught level must have one or more external examiners appointed. Expectations for external examiners are set out in a Code of Practice. https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/registry/policy/externalexaminers/index.aspx

Student Representation System
The Student Representation System (SRS) is a partnership between the University and the Guild of Students. The aim of the SRS is to ensure that every student at Birmingham is effectively represented to the University and the Guild by a fellow student/postgraduate researcher (PGR). It is founded on the belief that through effective representation students become partners in their education, which facilitates a more active involvement in, and ownership of, their learning.

Student representation at Birmingham is coordinated by a joint University-Guild committee, the Student Representation System Advisory Board, which is co-chaired by the Director of Student Engagement and the Guild Education Officer.

Data on these processes are reported to the University Quality Assurance Committee (UQAC) each session. UQAC may take action as necessary in response to this data, for example a Specific Check. This data is also reported to the University’s Council each session. https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/registry/policy/complaint-appeal/index.aspx https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/registry/policy/conduct/index.aspx
The University has a system of annual, periodic and one-off reviews which enable the University to assure the quality of its provision. In addition to these internal review mechanisms the University engages with outside agencies which review the activity of the University.

**Internal Review**

**Vice-Chancellor’s Integrated Review (VCIR)**
The quinquennial Vice-Chancellor’s Integrated Review process is a strategic and integrated peer review, providing a picture of the performance of the whole School and its contribution to enhancing the University’s performance in line with the Strategic Framework. The ‘education’ aspect of the process functions as the University’s ‘periodic review’ of learning and teaching.

[https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/planning/vcreview/index.aspx](https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/planning/vcreview/index.aspx)

**Annual Programme and Module Review**
Annual review of programmes and modules provides Schools with a regular opportunity to reflect on and evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching and supervisory portfolio, with a view to the continual enhancement of provision for students. The University’s Module Evaluation System, through which students are able to provide feedback on individual modules, is one of the inputs to the annual review process.

[https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/registry/policy/quality/annualreview/index.aspx](https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/registry/policy/quality/annualreview/index.aspx)

**Collaborative Provision Review**
Collaborative provision arrangements are normally subject to time-delimited legal agreements, usually with a review some 12 months before the expiry of the agreements. These programmes are also subject to Annual Programme Review by the relevant School within the University.

[https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/registry/policy/collaborative/formsandguidance.aspx](https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/registry/policy/collaborative/formsandguidance.aspx)

**Specific Checks**
A ‘Spec Check’ may be instigated where issues are identified which need to be followed up within a single School or College, or more widely, it may take the form of a College or University-level investigation and may cover such issues as a sharp increase in non-continuation rates, adverse student feedback, or a matter unresolved from a previous review. Such issues may be identified via student surveys, external examiner reports, student complaints or student grievances. They may be identified by UQAC, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) or Deputy, College Academic Policy Partners (CAPPs), a Director or Deputy Director of Education (or equivalent), or via another mechanism.

Spec Checks may also be carried out in areas which, over a period of time, have seen little focused review activity, or in order to evaluate the operation of, and compliance with, a policy or process. [https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/registry/policy/documents/staff/spec-check-guidance.pdf](https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/registry/policy/documents/staff/spec-check-guidance.pdf)

**External Review**

**Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs)**
A number of programmes of study delivered by the University of Birmingham are subject to various forms of accreditation and validation by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs). In many cases periodic review by the PSRB is a requirement of ongoing validation/accreditation. All PSRB reports are reviewed by the University to ensure that appropriate actions are being taken. The University Policy on PSRB’s can be found under the 'Taught Programmes and Modules' section on the Codes of Practice intranet pages.

[https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/registry/legislation/codesofpractice/index.aspx](https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/registry/legislation/codesofpractice/index.aspx)

**External Quality Assurance**
The University is regulated by the Office for Students (OfS) and, with regard to quality assurance, the designated body to which it has delegated such matters: the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). This involves adherence to OfS-defined conditions of registration and the QAA’s UK Quality Code for Higher Education, a commitment to the continuous improvement of the educational experience we offer students and engagement with the external quality assurance mechanisms managed by the OfS/QAA. Key University-level committees are responsible for managing our approach to external regulation (e.g. UQAC, University Education Committee, Senate).

Continues overleaf
Academic Policy and Quality Framework

Office of the Independent Adjudicator

The Higher Education Act (2004) requires that all universities subscribe to an independent ombudsman scheme for the resolution of student complaints. The Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) is the external ombudsman for higher education in England and Wales.

If asked to do so, the OIA will review the University’s final decision on matters of dispute between it and its students (complaints, academic appeals, appeals against misconduct/fitness to practise findings). The OIA’s review will consider whether the University applied its procedures properly and whether the decisions made at each stage were reasonable in all the circumstances. The OIA may also provide comment upon the University’s policies and procedures where it finds these to be inappropriate, for example where procedures are too long or complex, or where students are not given appropriate rights to a fair hearing.

UQAC considers data on all student complaints and appeals within the University on an annual basis. This includes information about cases which have been reviewed by the OIA. All recommendations made by the OIA are reported to UCAQ along with details of the University’s response to the recommendations.

www.oiahe.org.uk

Enhancement

The University is committed to the continuous enhancement of the quality of its provision, and enhancement is central to the University’s Strategic Framework and Education Strategy. Enhancement arises both from routine quality assurance processes (through which examples of good practice in teaching delivery and related areas are identified and shared) and from specific quality enhancement and development activity.

The University’s approach to enhancement in a broad sense is focused upon the delivery of a curriculum that:
- Offers breadth, stretch, challenge and opportunity
- Is personalised, inclusive and supportive
- Provides a research-intensive teaching and learning experience
- Engages students in their learning experience
- Promotes and values excellence in teaching

As a pioneering university delivering a research-intensive education, we can never stand still. In 2016, and again in 2019, we have engaged all staff and students across the institution in a ‘Big Conversation’ about education, the needs of future students and impacts on curriculum design and content. The key themes emerging from the Big Conversation include redefining research-intensive learning, developing a new model for inclusive education and Birmingham Digital.

At the heart of our excellent education is outstanding teaching. The University has always recognised the importance of supporting and rewarding teaching. In 2017, the University approved investment in a new institute dedicated to innovation in teaching, the Higher Education Futures institute (HEFi). HEFi engages staff and students across the University in research-intensive learning and teaching, offer opportunities for co-creation of curricula using ‘living labs’ with students, and provide enhanced learning opportunities across the University’s physical, virtual and transnational educational environments. Our aim is to support and develop innovation in higher education practice both internally and externally.
Committees

The elements of the Framework are overseen by Senate sub-Committees. This ensures the ongoing suitability of the Framework as well as an appropriate level of oversight of activities carried out under the Framework.

https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/registry/policy/committees/index.aspx

University Education Committee (UEC)
UEC oversees the development of the University’s Education Strategy and related educational activity, including student surveys. UEC reports to Senate. UEC is chaired by the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Education).

Student Academic Engagement Committee (SAEC)
SAEC focuses on improving the academic engagement of undergraduate and postgraduate students through developing strategies that will have a direct impact on academic outcomes whilst enhancing academic engagement. SAEC is chaired by the Director of Student Engagement. SAEC reports to UEC.

Student Access and Progress Committee (SAPC)
SAPC monitors the access, retention, attainment and progression of all undergraduate and post-graduate students. SAPC is chaired by the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Education). SAPC reports to UEC.

University Quality Assurance Committee (UQAC)
UQAC develops and keeps under review the University’s systems, strategic academic policy matters, policies and guidance for assuring the quality of the University’s academic provision, receiving reports from College Quality Assurance and Approval Committees (or equivalent). UQAC receives reports from College Boards and approves decisions about new programme and module development. UQAC is chaired by the Deputy Pro-Vice Chancellor (Education). UQAC reports to the University Education Committee (UEC).

Collaborative Provision Committee (CPC)
CPC considers, and if thought appropriate, approves all proposals for new collaborative arrangements prior to final approval. CPC is chaired by the Deputy Pro-Vice Chancellor (Education). CPC reports to UQAC.

Graduate Research Board (GRB)
GRB oversees post-graduate research strategy and other PGR matters including trends, completion rates, student feedback, marketing, recruitment and admissions. GRB develops new PGR training and research. GRB is chaired by the Postgraduate Dean. GRB reports to UQAC.

Student Representation System Advisory Board (SRSAB)
The Student Representation System is co-ordinated by SRSAB, a joint University-Guild committee chaired by the Director of Student Engagement and the Guild Education Officer. SRSAB reports to SAEC.

University Executive Board (UEB)
UEB (which is not a sub-Committee of Senate) considers summary reports on the annual review of taught provision, external examiner comments on taught provision, and Student Conduct, Complaints and Appeals. UEB also has oversight of the VCIR process. UEB is chaired by the Vice Chancellor and Principal.