



## Board of Trustees

<b>MEETING DATE</b>	07/07/2023	
<b>REPORT TITLE</b>	Quality Assurance Report to the Board of Trustees for the 21/22 Academic Year	
<b>CLASSIFICATION</b>	<b>PUBLIC</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<b>OPEN</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<b>CONFIDENTIAL</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	<b>CONFIDENTIAL &amp; SENSITIVE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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<b>Sponsored by:</b> Professor Judith Squires	<b>Job Title:</b> DVC and Provost	
<b>For decision</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>For discussion:</b> <input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>The Board is asked to:</b> <b>APPROVE</b> the annual report on quality assurance to the Board of Trustees		
<p><b>Executive Summary</b></p> <p>This report summarises quality assurance activities undertaken during the 21/22 academic year and discusses their impacts. It provides assurance for the Board on quality and standards and enables the Board to meet their duties to ensure that systems are in place for securing continued compliance by the University as a provider of higher education with the Office for Students' (OfS) ongoing conditions of registration. These encompass: a high-quality academic experience for all (Condition B1), support throughout the student's journey necessary for all to succeed (Condition B2), successful outcomes for all (Condition B3), effective assessment to ensure qualifications are credible and hold their value (Condition B4) and conform to sector standards (Condition B5).</p> <p>Note that the report contains links to various existing documents. These links are for the University Academic Quality and Standards Committee SharePoint site and you may need to request access to this site if you wish to see the individual documents.</p>		
<b>Link to the <a href="#">University Strategic Plan</a></b>	<b>NO</b> <input type="checkbox"/>	<b>YES</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Links to the 'inspiring education and transformative student experience' pillar in the University Strategy.		
<b>Link to <a href="#">Risk Register</a></b>	<b>NO</b> <input type="checkbox"/>	<b>YES</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
1E – Educational Quality		
<b>Summary of any consultations carried out</b>	<b>NO</b> <input type="checkbox"/>	<b>YES</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
This report has been reviewed and endorsed by UAQSC, UEC and Senate.		
<b>Summary of any Equality, Diversity &amp; Inclusion implications</b>	<b>NO</b> <input type="checkbox"/>	<b>YES</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Please note section 15 which observes that some award gaps have reopened following the end of wide-scale pandemic mitigations. Additional work will be undertaken to understand this further.		
<b>Does this report need to go to another Body/Committee?</b>	<b>NO</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>YES</b> <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Report/Supporting Information attached</b>	<b>NO</b> <input type="checkbox"/>	<b>YES</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

## Quality Assurance Report to Board of Trustees: 2021/22 Academic Year

### Introduction

1. Ongoing conditions for registration with the Office for Students (OfS) requires us to assure the quality of our education, the reliability of our standards and positive outcomes for all students (described in the B conditions by the OfS). As a member of the Russell Group and one of the UK's top higher education institutions our commitment to students goes beyond baseline compliance and hence our quality framework embeds elements of enhancement to drive improvement (Appendix, Fig 1).
2. The changing external environment is illustrated by the number of significant consultations that the OfS ran during 21/22 regarding quality and the student experience. These have resulted in considerable change to the conditions of registration. Engagement with such consultations is essential to ensure we influence outcomes and are prepared for change (see Appendix, Table 1).
3. This report briefly documents how the Board of Trustees can be assured that education provision during the 21/22 academic year met the OfS B conditions for ongoing registration and that our quality assurance plans for 22/23 can give the Board ongoing confidence in our provision.

### Suitability of our Internal Quality Framework Arrangements for 21/22

4. Following stakeholder evaluation and feedback on the 20/21 quality framework a plan for the 21/22 academic year was agreed by University Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC) ([AQSC 2122 03](#)). The use of University Quality Team (UQT) reviews to interrogate School education action planning continues to be the backbone of our framework (Fig 1). It is an agile and risk-based process that occurs in selected Schools following data analysis by the UQT and discussion with Faculties (Dean and Faculty Education Directors). A continued pause in periodic programme revalidation was agreed for 21/22 due to the uncertainties arising from the COVID situation and plans agreed for how this activity would be re-introduced in 22/23 ([AQSC 2122 05](#)).
5. Internal audits during 21/22 of academic quality (covering UQT reviews and education action planning - EAP) and new programme approval confirmed that these processes were proportionate and fit for purpose ([AQSC 2223 10](#)). Identified opportunities for enhancement of these processes have been actioned ([AQSC 2223 36](#)).
6. The OfS published revised B conditions for ongoing registration in March 2022. Mapping of these to our internal framework confirmed its appropriateness and identified actions to further strengthen our assurance processes ([AQSC 2122 58](#)).

### Evidence of Quality Assurance of our Education Provision in 21/22

The points below provide evidence to assure the Board of Trustees of compliance with the OfS B conditions for ongoing registration:

7. 43 UQT reviews were undertaken in 21/22 (37 taught and 6 research) with no external regulatory compliance concerns identified. Each resulted in actions for relevant role-holders or committees in the Department, School, Faculty or a central division, many of which supported enhancement of provision and the student experience. Common themes discussed across taught provision UQTs were; unplanned student growth, student voice and community building, assessment and feedback and the student experience on interdisciplinary programmes ([AQSC 2223 07](#)). Common themes across provision for postgraduate research students were; availability of space, impact of the pandemic, building communities, equality of opportunities, communication and representation ([AQSC 2122 39](#)).

8. Hearing and responding to the student voice is an important element of both quality assurance and enhancement. Formal opportunities for student feedback is via internal and external surveys and Student Staff Liaison Committees (SSLCs) and these data sources feed into UQT reviews together with input from our trained Student Quality Reviewers who meet with student representatives as part of the UQT review process to obtain 'live' feedback.
  - a. Bristol Live Unit Evaluation (Blue) was launched in 21/22 for both mid and end of unit feedback for undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes in all Schools (2,257 end of unit surveys in total) except the Medical and Dental Schools, due to their programme structures. Interestingly mapping institutional results from questions in this internal survey to those from the National Student Survey (NSS) presents a more positive student perspective (Appendix, Fig 2). Understanding this difference is important in furthering our appreciation of the student experience. For 22/23 Blue is being rolled out to the Medical and Dental Schools and work to improve engagement by students and staff is ongoing.
  - b. National Student Survey (NSS) - despite some 'bounce-back' in NSS results following the disruption of the pandemic our performance in this survey continues to be challenging ([UEB Presentation July 2022](#)). The coinciding of significant levels of industrial action in Schools with large student cohorts has understandable impact on these results, especially following closely after pandemic disruption for these same cohorts. NSS 2022 data feeds into the 2023 Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) as part of the four years of aggregated data, replacing stronger data from 2018, hence weakening our TEF starting point. Work of the Curriculum Enhancement Programme in supporting Schools in creating integrated, authentic and inclusive assessments is a critical piece of work, together with consideration of our personal tutoring offer.
  - c. Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) – 21/22 was the first year of our engagement with this survey. It is important to highlight that although this is a national survey results are not published and there is significantly less marketing and external support which is reflected in the lower response rates (13%) compared to the NSS. However, results are generally positive across the institution. Sector average data is made available, and this also suggests our postgraduate taught student experience is largely positive ([UEC overview of PRES](#)). The focus moving forward will be on building response rates to increase confidence in the messages this survey is relaying.
  - d. Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) – engagement with the PRES occurs in alternate years with our last survey being 2021, which had a 37% response rate. When compared with a Global Benchmark Group (n=89) Bristol ranked 49<sup>th</sup> for overall experience. More granular analysis identified specific recommendations being taken forward by University Postgraduate Research Committee ([UPGRC 1310 21](#)).
9. During 21/22 20 new programmes (9 undergraduate and 11 postgraduate taught) and 15 significant changes to existing programmes (1 undergraduate, 2 postgraduate taught and 12 postgraduate research) were approved. These changes are considered by AQSC with two University Education Directors providing detailed scrutiny of proposals to ensure they comply with our strategy, regulations and external expectations. This level of academic scrutiny occurs once the business case has been approved by New Programmes Board. In addition, AQSC considered and approved 10 programmes for withdrawal (5 undergraduate and 5 postgraduate taught) and 4 programmes for suspension (1 undergraduate and 3 postgraduate taught) during this year. Similar levels of portfolio change were seen in 20/21 (18 new, 13 withdrawn and 6 suspended).
10. The delivery of education in partnership with external stakeholders is a growing area of our provision, especially in relation to postgraduate research opportunities. The University has been able to take advantage of specific opportunities, where they have arisen through contacts in schools and faculties with several institutions. Examples include a further Dual PhD award with

the University of Naples Federico II and the Faculty of Engineering at Bristol, and a framework agreement for multiple distance learning PhDs hosted at Alfaisal University and supervised remotely from the Bristol Medical School. A further significant area of collaboration is in relation to the provision of specialist work-based placements and clinical teaching for our professional programmes of Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary Science in the Faculty of Health Sciences.

Following initial work during 20/21 a new process for approval of educational partnerships was introduced in 21/22 ([AQSC 2122 10](#)) giving AQSC oversight of partnership arrangements and a key role in their approval.

11. All of our taught programmes utilise external examiners who provide a crucial means for ensuring we continue to maintain the academic standards of our awards. Each submits an annual report, to which the school responds setting out their response to any recommendations made. The reports are response are scrutinised and considered within the UQT review. No significant issues were identified within external examiner reports from undergraduate programmes in 21/22 and a central review is underway to identify any emerging themes for discussion at AQSC.

External examiners are involved in the examination of all research student, which is important for maintaining standards of these awards. The number of research degrees awarded in 21/22 (604) have returned to typical levels expected pre-pandemic (604 compared to 523 in 20/21). Outcomes for research degree examinations have continued in a similar pattern in recent years with higher proportions of errors of substance in Arts and Social Sciences and Law, reflecting disciplinary and cultural practices within these Faculties rather than any weaknesses ([AQSC 2223 14](#)).

12. 201 of our programmes in 21/22 (including some that are teaching out) are accredited by 35 different professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs). 11 successful accreditation events occurred during 21/22 ([AQSC 2223 33](#)) including two new accreditations (Chartered Institution for Archaeologists and the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy). In addition, the School of Management chose to cancel accreditation from the Chartered Management Institute. For some programmes this external scrutiny is essential (e.g. medicine) whilst elsewhere it is optional. In all cases it provides additional confidence in the quality of the education provided.
13. As for previous years a report discussing the granularity of both appeals and complaints will be brought to the Board of Trustees as a separate paper.

### **Degrees Outcomes in 21/22**

14. Unlike in the previous two years no new temporary amendments were needed to the regulations for classification of taught programmes for 21/22. However, the covid related temporary amendments that were in place during 19/20 and 20/21 are still having an impact upon classifications in 21/22 as [outlined](#). Changes to the regulations contained with the Codes of Practice for 21/22 occurred as per the standard process, that is via consideration by the Codes Executive Group with approval by AQSC and University Education Committee and are summarised [here](#).
15. Thorough analysis of our taught degree outcomes in 21/22 has been conducted ([AQSC 2223 40](#)). This illustrates that we are in line with sector and Russell Group patterns for undergraduate degree outcomes in 21/22 and are on track to meet the UUK commitment of returning such outcomes to 2018/29 levels by 2022/23. However, next year's results will be impacted by the move to integer unit marks and modelling suggests a small amount of grade inflation is likely. Disappointingly some award gaps have reopened following the end of wide-scale pandemic mitigations and additional work will be undertaken to understand this further.

16. To support schools in determining awards a 'Classification Calculator' was created during 21/22. A reported issue in its workings resulted in a check on all 21/22 undergraduate awarded classifications to ensure no student had been disadvantaged. This check showed that whilst the calculator problem had not resulted in any classification errors, 7 cases were identified where a lower award had been made as a result of human error in processing the classification. These 7 awards were immediately rescinded, the correct awards made, and individuals affected supported as necessary. Actions to ensure such errors are not repeated were agreed together with a commitment to undertake this check on an annual basis ([AQSC 2223 06](#)).
17. Cases of academic misconduct in 21/22 have nearly doubled from that seen in 20/21 across our taught populations ([AQSC 2223 24](#)). However, some of this increase is due to improved processes around misconduct and recording of cases rather than an increase in misconduct per se. Plagiarism was the largest cause of academic misconduct, accounting for 53% of cases in 21/22. One quarter of cases detected were considered poor academic practice, illustrating the need for improved guidance and support for students in this area. Work over the summer of 21/22 has focussed on developing online training for new taught students and this has been trialled and evaluated ([AQSC 2223 19](#)) in the first teaching block of 22/23 with discussions underway on how to integrate this into programmes of study.

### **Future Perspectives**

18. Whilst continued industrial action and the legacy of previous disruption from the pandemic upon the student experience are likely to pose challenges, steps are being taken to refocus upon changes to the academic year structure for 24/25 that should improve student and staff experience. Programmes will be considering what changes to assessments, learning and delivery are necessary to fit to this new framework. The curriculum enhancement programme is supporting schools in this regard with a series of curriculum design workshops that will encourage a more holistic programme design and link with the new assessment strategy.
19. The changing regulatory environment being driven by the OfS provides an opportunity for us to consider our quality framework. Whilst the introduction of a more bureaucratic, metric driven, external regulatory system in relation to student outcome indicators may appear a negative step it is important to highlight that the OfS thresholds stated for ongoing registration are relatively low for us as an institution (Appendix, Table 2).
20. However, it is important to highlight that in addition to the institutional data shown below there are further groupings and splits that bring additional granularity and this data is provided from the OfS on an annual basis. This will allow us to focus support on areas near to thresholds, or areas with a downward trajectory, that may present a higher risk and thus support a more targeted, proportionate approach within our quality framework allowing for a suitable balance between assurance and enhancement.
21. Whilst there is an agreed approach for the quality framework in 22/23 ([AQSC 2223 03](#)) further discussion on the balance between assurance and enhancement is necessary. The Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) has also been relaunched, and our submission ([TEF 2023](#)) was completed in January 2023 with an outcome expected in August. Whilst the next TEF is four years away it is important that we recognise a) the benefits and limitations of our data and continue work to improve this and, b) the challenges we have faced in completing a narrative that is evidence based and consider how we can improve this by evaluating the impact of strategic initiatives.

Appendix – Figures:

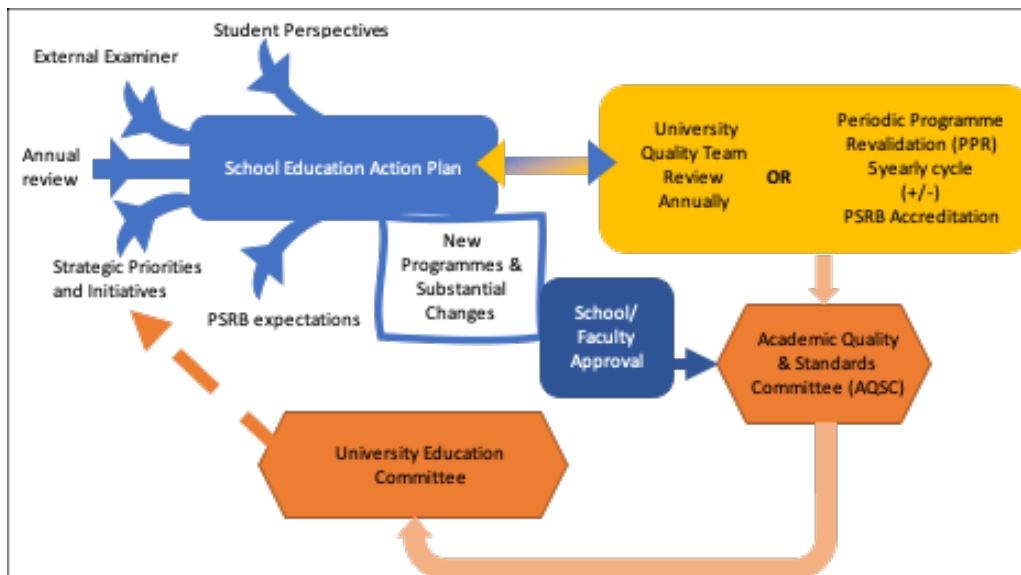


Fig 1: Diagrammatic representation of our quality framework illustrating how key quality assurance inputs feed into the school’s education action plan and how review and oversight of activities occurs within our governance system. Abbreviations: PSRB – Professional, statutory and regulatory bodies.

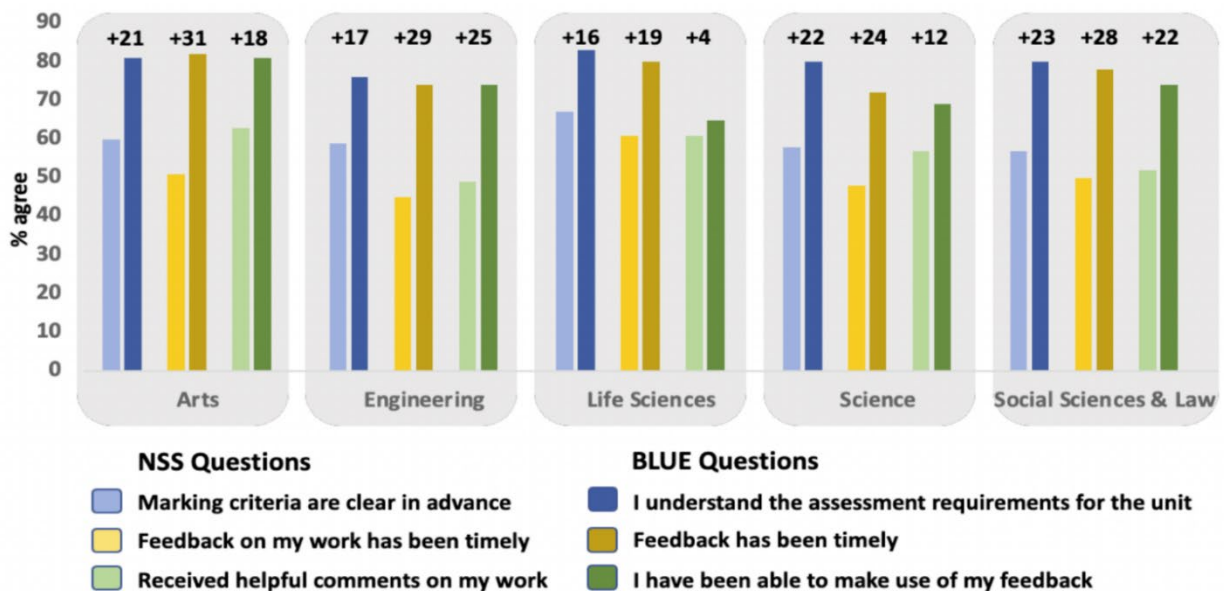


Figure 2: Illustration of the % of students who agree with specific assessment and feedback statements in 2022 NSS compared to equivalent questions in our own internal survey. Respondents for our internal survey: Arts 4309, Engineering 2772, Life Sciences 2534, Science 2003 and Social Sciences & Law 4852 students across all UG years. NB Health Sciences not included as student feedback was not completed using Blue at this time.

Appendix – Tables:

Consultation	Date	Response
OfS – Quality and Standards	September 2021	<a href="#">AQSC/2122/06</a>
OfS - Student Outcomes and TEF	February 2022	<a href="#">AQSC/2122/30</a>
OfS - B3 Conditions of Registration, TEF and Indicators	March 2022	<a href="#">AQSC/2122/46</a>

**Table 1: Engagement with External Consultations on Quality and Standards in 21/22**

		Continuation		Completion		Progression	
		OfS Threshold	UoB Indicator	OfS Threshold	UoB Indicator	OfS Threshold	UoB Indicator
Full Time	UG	80	96.9	75	96.2	60	76.8
	UG with PG component	85	98	85	96.4	75	89.4
	PGT	80	97.2	80	97.2	70	82.9
	PGR	90	97.4	75	93.3	85	94.1
Part Time	UG	55	70.2	40	49.3	70	Low data
	PGT	65	84.7	65	85.7	85	91.2
	PGR	70	86.5	60	74.8	85	92.6

**Table 2: Institutional metrics in relation to the student outcome indications of continuation, completion and progression**