

# Northumbria University – Framework for Quality and Standards

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# 1 Introduction

This document updates the Northumbria University Quality and Standards Framework originally approved in September 2016 and last revised in March 2019.

Since the last framework was agreed the Office for Students (OfS) has taken on regulatory authority for UK HE providers, with the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) as the designated quality body (DQB). The OfS expectation (outlined in the [Regulatory framework for higher education in England](#)) is that governing bodies assure themselves that their institution is meeting the [Conditions of Registration](#). OfS will not conduct routine engagement with individual HE providers but will use data and contextual information to decide whether there are risks and whether it needs to intervene. The provider must also monitor and [report](#) any event that might impact on its compliance. In addition, a sample of institutions (c.5% of providers) will be audited each year. The QAA undertakes such audits on behalf of the OfS.

For the purposes of this framework the key underpinning OfS Conditions of Registration are those relating to quality, reliable standards and positive outcomes for all students:

- Condition B1:** The provider must deliver well-designed courses that provide a high quality academic experience for all students and enable a student's achievement to be reliably assessed.
- Condition B2:** The provider must provide all students, from admission through to completion, with the support that they need to succeed in and benefit from higher education.
- Condition B3:** The provider must deliver successful outcomes for all of its students, which are recognised and valued by employers and/or enable further study.
- Condition B4:** The provider must ensure that qualifications awarded to students hold their value at the point of qualification and over time, in line with sector recognised standards.
- Condition B5:** The provider must deliver courses that meet the academic standards as they are described in the FHEQ at Level 4 or higher.
- Condition B6:** The provider must participate in the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework.

In addition, the Framework is cognisant of the following OfS Conditions of Registration:

- Condition A1:** An approved provider must have in force an access and participation plan approved by OfS and take all reasonable steps to comply with the provisions of the plan.
- Condition C1:** The provider must demonstrate that in developing and implementing its policies, procedures and terms and conditions, it has given due regard to relevant guidance about how to comply with consumer protection law.
- Condition E2:** The provider must have in place adequate and effective management and governance arrangements.



The Framework also aligns with the expectations and core practices outlined in the revised [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#), and in addition is informed by:

- The [Frameworks for HE Qualifications](#) of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies (FHEQ) / [Framework for Qualifications for the European Higher Education Area](#) (FQ-EHEA)
- [Higher Education Credit Framework for England](#)
- [QAA Subject Benchmark statements](#)
- [Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance](#) in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)

The main purposes of Northumbria University's Quality and Standards Framework, in line with external regulatory requirements are to:

- secure the academic standards of Northumbria awards, assuring applicants, students, graduates, and the public that:
  - the level of achievement required for those awards meets or exceeds national, international and relevant professional requirements and is comparable to those expected by other UK Higher Education institutions.
  - curricula are up to date and in line with external expectations for the subject.
  - external expert advice is embedded in our approval, assessment and review processes.
- assure and continuously improve the academic quality of the student learning experience, ensuring that students from all backgrounds:
  - receive excellent and effective forms of teaching, assessment and support which enables them to achieve their individual potential.
  - are provided with learning opportunities to enable them to attain the academic standards and develop the knowledge required for their award.
  - develop the experience and skills to enable them to achieve successful professional outcomes after graduation.
- enhance the University's excellent reputation for quality and standards, evidenced in reports from external bodies including professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs), in-country regulators and partner institutions.



## 2 General Principles

The key principles underlying this Framework are that:

- Overall responsibility for the management of Northumbria University's standards and quality rests with the Board of Governors who are responsible for compliance with the OfS Ongoing Conditions of Registration.
- Quality is everybody's business - the primary responsibility for the quality of the student experience lies at the point of delivery, with the staff engaged in teaching and supporting learning in the University's Faculties, its support services and, where appropriate, its partner institutions.
- Quality assurance procedures support the University's aim of delivering an outstanding student experience and equal outcomes for all; they should lead to continuous improvement of learning and teaching; should be evidence-based and make full use of available metrics; subject to ongoing review of their effectiveness.

## 3 Governance and Institutional Oversight of Quality Assurance and Standard

### 3.1 Executive Responsibilities

- The Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive on behalf of the Board of Governors has responsibility for the quality and standards of the University's awards.
- To support the Vice-Chancellor and the University Executive the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC) and Pro Vice-Chancellors (PVC) have specific responsibilities including: Faculty oversight; Research and Innovation; Business and Enterprise; International; Research Excellence Framework; and Employability and Partnerships.
- Faculty Pro Vice-Chancellors have responsibility for quality and standards of programmes in their respective Faculties and for the operation of Faculty and Department level processes; Faculty Deputy Pro Vice-Chancellors, Faculty Directors of Quality Assurance and Registrars provide support to the Faculty Pro Vice-Chancellors.
- The Academic Registrar and Director of Student, Library and Academic Services have responsibility for the operation and maintenance of University academic frameworks and regulations for taught programmes.
- The PVC Research and Innovation has responsibility for operation and maintenance of the University academic frameworks and regulations for research degrees.
- The University Executive oversees institutional planning processes, high level strategies and annual and five-year plans for Faculties and Services which ensure robust management of resources for the delivery of high quality learning, teaching and assessment.

### 3.2 Committees

Academic Board has overall responsibility for the University's awards, the quality and standards of academic programmes and the quality assurance framework. As the primary academic committee, Academic Board approves new educational partnerships and changes to academic and regulatory



frameworks. More detailed functions are largely delegated to Education Committee (EC) for taught programmes, and the Research and Innovation Committee (RIC)/Graduate School Committee (GSC) for research degrees. Academic Portfolio Group (APG) reports to University Executive and approves the business case for new programmes and partners, and oversees programme approval through University Approval Panels. Students are represented at key Academic Board committees through the elected officers of the Students' Union.

### **3.3 The University's academic and regulatory framework**

The key elements of the University's academic framework are:

- 3.3.1 The Programme Framework for Northumbria Awards ([PFNA](#)) and associated pillars.
- 3.3.2 The [Principles for Approval of Northumbria Awards](#).
- 3.3.3 The Professional Doctorate Framework.
- 3.3.4 Northumbria University's Academic Regulations for Taught Awards ([ARTA](#)).
- 3.3.5 Northumbria University's [Academic Regulations for Research Awards](#).
- 3.3.6 Northumbria University's [Handbook of Student Regulations](#).
- 3.3.7 The University's [Ethics in Research Policy](#) which applies to all of those engaged in research at Northumbria, including research students, taught postgraduates and undergraduates.
- 3.3.8 The [Review Framework](#).
- 3.3.9 Additional supporting policies, including external examiner appointment and moderation.

### **3.4 Reviewing the NU Quality and Standards Framework**

The elements of this framework are reviewed regularly to ensure their fitness for purpose:

- New external quality assurance requirements are reported to EC and where appropriate assigned for consideration to the relevant university committee or group which reports back to EC on any necessary action.
- EC and/or the Graduate School Committee review academic regulations and frameworks regularly.
- An annual review of Examination Board Procedures and Assessment Regulations is conducted for EC and this, together with the annual summary of External Examiner Reports, informs the annual review of Assessment Regulations.
- Regular reviews of approval, review and enhancement procedures are conducted by EC.

## **4 Design and approval of programmes**

Northumbria's programmes align to the following external reference points noted above.

Additionally:

- All programmes are designed in line with Northumbria's Programme Framework for Northumbria Awards ([PFNA](#)) underpinned by the four supporting pillars of research-rich



learning, technology enhanced learning, employability and assessment for learning and achievement.

- Procedures for approval of new taught programmes and modifications are detailed in the [Approvals and Review](#) section of the website. The programme approval process secures academic standards by reference to external reference points (including relevant PSRB requirements when appropriate) as well as the views of an external expert. The quality of the student learning experience is assured through scrutiny of resources to support the student experience as well as learning, teaching and assessment strategies. Approval panel membership includes student representation.
- Where Northumbria awards result from international partnership, every effort is made to ensure alignment with the requirements of relevant national quality assurance agencies.
- [Programme Specifications](#) are published on the University's web site.

## 5 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment

[Student partnership](#) working incorporates the key themes of learning, consultation, representation and participation and student communication, which are reflected in the [Student Engagement Plan](#).

The following strategies are identified:

- The collection of student feedback through digitally delivered questionnaires, at module and programme level complemented by external surveys including the National Student Survey (NSS), the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) and the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES). Data from these surveys feeds into module, programme and Periodic Review processes.
- Student representatives are included on Student Staff Programme Committees and other relevant engagement forums with training provided by the Students' Union.
- A system of Departmental representatives provides representation on a range of Faculty and University level forums. Student Union sabbatical officers sit on the main University Committees including Academic Board, EC and RIC.
- Themed Go Out and Listen (GOAL) days run by the Students' Union.
- The Periodic Review panel includes a Student Union sabbatical officer whose responsibilities include chairing a separate open student meeting which informs the production of a Student Written Submission for the review.
- Educational partnership approval events include, where possible, a meeting with students at the partner institution. The operations manual details the arrangements for Student Staff Programme Committees and collection of feedback from students.

Northumbria's PFNA outlines the characteristics of a Northumbria graduate, which are articulated in programme and module specifications. Specifically the research-rich learning pillar underpins Northumbria's expectation that programmes will enable all students to be developed as critical scholars, and the Assessment for Learning and Achievement Policy emphasises the need to design assessment tasks that, as well as demonstrating the achievement of learning outcomes, engage and challenge students, and support their learning.



## 6 Enhancement of Learning, Teaching and Assessment

Key activities to promote enhancement include:

- Northumbria's review processes (Periodic Review, Annual Programme Monitoring and Module Evaluation) which are underpinned by a continuous improvement philosophy whereby good practice is shared and areas for improvement are identified, including action planning against key data sets including NSS results, retention data, awards data and graduate outcomes data.
- The Teaching Excellence team is the academic-led enhancement team for learning and teaching. A culture of learning communities is fostered within the institution, within and across Faculties and Departments, to support and share innovative learning, teaching and assessment practice.
- Northumbria's Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund ([TQEF](#)) rewards excellent teaching initiatives and encourages staff to develop/design/share enhancement initiatives.
- Each year the Students' Union asks students to nominate staff members for their Student Led award scheme.
- University strategic business outcomes:
  - supporting staff and students to be digitally fluent (BO6)
  - embedding technological innovation in the curriculum (BO21)
- A range of staff development activities (see section 7).

## 7 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification

### 7.1 Student Admission

NU's [Admissions Policy](#), complemented by its [Access and Participation Plan](#) (APP), details its admission processes underpinned by the following aims:

- To admit students who are qualified and able to succeed on NU programmes.
- Deliver high quality recruitment and admissions services for enquirers, applicants and students.
- Deliver admissions services which are fair, transparent, consistently applied and well communicated.
- Achieve University Access and Participation and recruitment targets.
- Deliver high quality support services to students with demonstrated best practice for Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) requirements and support for equality, diversity and inclusivity.

### 7.2 Induction

The Welcome, Induction and Orientation Code of Practice supports the planning and delivery of a co-ordinated approach (across Faculties and services) at Programme and University levels. It recognises the needs of a diverse student body, including international students, returning students, disabled students, mature students, part-time students and



students studying at partner campuses.

### 7.3 Student Progression

The following procedures ensure a fair, equitable and transparent process for the management of assessment results in line with sector standards:

- *Management of Examination Boards:* The University operates a single system of Examination Boards for taught awards. The roles, membership and duties of the Examination Boards and the requirements for marking and moderation of assessments are clearly defined in the [Moderation Policy](#).
- *External Examiners* are appointed to cover all taught programmes and their responsibilities include the verification of the standards of the University's awards and of the fairness of its assessment processes. The role of the External Examiner and process and criteria for appointment are clearly articulated. External Examiners are required to report annually, including confirmation of standards. Faculties respond to reports and a summary report is prepared annually for EC and Academic Board.

### 7.4 Certification

- All award level students can access a transcript detailing performance on modules studied and a Diploma Supplement to support international transferability.
- All UK based students are alerted to their interim and final Higher Education Award Report (HEAR) and are encouraged to refer to their HEAR in discussions with their personal tutor and the Graduate Futures Service.

## 8 Teaching staff

To promote high quality learning and teaching, staff are supported in [Developing Teaching](#) through the following activities led by the Teaching Excellence team:

- the Northumbria University Framework for Professional Standards ([NUPRS](#)), which includes a professional recognition scheme and support for applying for HEA Fellowship.
- a [Learning and Teaching Development \(CPD\)](#) programme.
- a [Peer Observation and Support](#) scheme.
- early career academics with limited teaching experience are required to submit a FHEA application via the NUPRS experiential route or the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice as part of probation.

The Postgraduate Graduate Research (PGR) Teaching scheme<sup>1</sup> supports PGR students, recruited to undertake teaching, learning and assessment activity.

Northumbria's Academic Promotions and Careers Framework, which comprises a Teaching and/or Research pathway, provides the opportunity for staff to progress through to Professor. An evidence-based application, which is judged against performance criteria, is pivotal to developing

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<sup>1</sup> Final scheme to be agreed as at 6 March 2020



and delivering the university's global reputation for academic excellence. This aligns to the University Strategy Business Outcome that by 2023 all academic staff will hold a teaching qualification.

## 9 Learning resources and student support

The management of learning resources and student support is embedded in NU's strategic and operational planning processes and in its approval and review processes. These cater for the academic, personal and professional needs of students with a particular emphasis on successful transitions and academic progression. A coordinated and cohesive student experience is achieved through Faculties working with the full range of service departments. The ongoing student journey is supported by:

- The personal tutoring policy.
- The student attendance and monitoring policy.
- An institutional approach to the structure and digital delivery of student handbooks.
- Specific teams within Student, Academic and Library Services including:
  - [Student Life and Wellbeing](#).
  - Student Engagement Team (including 24/7 Ask4Help service). The team support student retention through use of data analytics to identify and reach out to students potentially at risk of disengaging with their programme.
  - [Skills Plus Service](#), a collection of on-line learning materials.
  - [Graduate Futures](#), offering advice on careers and employability.
  - Northumbria Language Centre
- The Northumbria student portal and NU Connect app.
- The consistent use of our selected VLE: Blackboard Ultra.

## 10 Public information

Information provided for students and other stakeholders about their programmes of study is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy and aligns to Northumbria's mission and strategic plan, and to [Competition and Markets Authority](#) guidance. The marketing and admissions team, working with academic departments ensure that correct and appropriate detail about programmes is provided on our website and at open days, (informed by the programme approvals process). Student programme handbooks are updated annually to support students through their studies and the [Student Charter](#) is a summary of the University's aspirations for all students and has been developed in partnership with the Students' Union.

## 11 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes

Procedures for [review of taught programmes and modules](#) are detailed in the University's Review Handbook.

**Periodic Review** of departmental provision takes place on a six-yearly cycle to a schedule approved by EC and makes judgements on:

- the setting and maintenance of threshold academic standards.



- the quality of students' learning opportunities.
- information about higher education provision.
- the enhancement of students' learning opportunities.

**Annual Programme Monitoring (APM)** is an evidence-based process, drawing on programme data, module evaluation (see below), employment data, external examiner feedback and student feedback.

**Module evaluation** occurs after each delivery and considers student performance and feedback, reflections of the teaching team and external comments.

**Postgraduate Research** provision is reviewed periodically on a six-yearly cycle using the standard periodic review process. Annual monitoring of the progress of research degree students is monitored electronically, through a series of milestones and reported at Faculty and Institutional level.

Programmes delivered with **educational partnerships** are approved for fixed time periods, and periodic review is primarily through the re-approval process.

These processes are currently being reviewed to factor in changes to the regulatory landscape, including the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF).