

# Northumbria University – Framework for Quality and Standards

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# Contents

- 1 Introduction ..... 1
- 2 General Principles ..... 2
- 3 Governance and Institutional Oversight of Quality Assurance and Standard ..... 3
  - 3.1 Executive Responsibilities ..... 3
  - 3.2 Committees ..... 3
  - 3.3 The University’s academic and regulatory framework..... 4
  - 3.4 Reviewing the NU Quality and Standards Framework ..... 4
- 4 Design and approval of programmes ..... 4
- 5 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment..... 5
- 6 Enhancement of Learning, Teaching and Assessment..... 6
- 7 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification..... 6
  - 7.1 Student Admission ..... 6
  - 7.2 Induction..... 6
  - 7.3 Student Progression ..... 7
  - 7.4 Certification..... 7
- 8 Teaching staff..... 7
- 9 Learning resources and student support..... 8
- 10 Public information ..... 8
- 11 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes..... 8



## 1 Introduction

This framework reflects the OfS expectation (outlined in the [Regulatory framework for higher education in England](#)) that governing bodies assure themselves that their institution is meeting the [Conditions of Registration](#).

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. These were revised in March and July 2022:

- **Condition B1** which requires that all students receive a high-quality academic experience. This means that courses must be up to date, challenging and well delivered, and equip students with the skills they will need after graduation.
- **Condition B2** which requires that all students receive the resources and support they need to succeed on their courses and after graduation. This is particularly important for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- **Condition B3** requires providers to deliver successful outcomes for all students, which are recognised and valued by employers and/or enable further study.
- **Condition B4** which clamps down on grade inflation by requiring universities and colleges to assess students effectively and award qualifications that are credible and stand the test of time.
- **Condition B5** which ensures that the standard of qualifications is consistent with sector-recognised standards.
- **Condition B6** requires all providers (in England) to participate in the Teaching Excellence 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 to continue to comply with all conditions of its registration.

Although not a regulatory requirement, the Framework 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](#)
- The [Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education](#) (iFATE) for apprenticeship standards and oversight.
- The compliance requirements of the [Education and Skills Funding Agency](#) (ESFA) in



relation to Degree and Higher Apprenticeships.

- Ofsted [Education Inspection Framework](#) (further education and skills)

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.

N.B. Some of the policies linked in this document can only be accessed by Northumbria staff and students. For further detail please contact [ar.gte.regs@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto:ar.gte.regs@northumbria.ac.uk).

## 2 General Principles

The key principles underlying this Framework are that:

- Overall responsibility for the assurance 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 and other key regulatory requirements.
- 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, including research-enriched learning; 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 Standards**

### **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: Education; Faculty oversight; Research and Knowledge Exchange; and International.
- 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 (Education), Faculty Directors of Quality Assurance, Registrars, Heads of Department, and Directors of Education provide support to the Faculty Pro Vice-Chancellors.
- The Directors of the London and Amsterdam Campuses work with respective Faculties and Departments in relation to any campus-specific quality and standards issues.
- The Dean of Apprenticeships works with respective Faculties and Departments to ensure that any relevant additional frameworks and quality assurance systems are in place for apprenticeship provision.
- The Director of Student, Library and Academic Services and Academic Registrar has responsibility for the operation and maintenance of University academic frameworks and regulations for taught programmes.
- The PVC Research and Knowledge Exchange 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 longer-term 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.

Planning Committee reports to University Executive and approves the business case for new programmes and partners (following the annual planning process). Education Committee (via the Quality and Standards Sub-Committee) oversees the University Approval Panels which consider the educational viability of new programmes. A number of other sub-committees including Faculty Education Committees and Apprenticeship Sub-committee have defined responsibilities for ensuring quality and standards at a more local level. 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/plinth.
- 3.3.2 The Approvals Framework ([Principles for Approval of Northumbria Awards](#)).
- 3.3.3 The Professional Doctorate Framework.
- 3.3.4 The [Apprenticeship Framework](#).
- 3.3.5 Northumbria University's Academic Regulations for Taught Awards ([ARTA](#)).
- 3.3.6 Northumbria University's [Academic Regulations for Research Awards](#).
- 3.3.7 Northumbria University's [Handbook of Student Regulations](#).
- 3.3.8 Northumbria University's policies, practices and guidance on [Research Ethics and Integrity](#) which applies to all of those engaged in research at Northumbria, including research students, taught postgraduates and undergraduates.
- 3.3.9 The [Review Framework](#).

Additional supporting policies<sup>1</sup>.

### 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 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, and the Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity Plinth.

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<sup>1</sup> Full details of policies in relation to education and research can be found at these links:  
<https://www.northumbria.ac.uk/about-us/university-services/student-library-and-academic-services/quality-and-teaching-excellence/assessment/assessment-regulations-and-policies/>  
<https://www.northumbria.ac.uk/about-us/university-services/student-library-and-academic-services/academic-support/the-graduate-school/academic-regulations/>



- Procedures for approval of new taught programmes and modifications are detailed in the policies referenced under 3.2.2 and 3.3.9 above. The programme approval process secures academic standards by reference to external reference points (including relevant PSRB requirements and apprenticeship standards 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, alignment with any requirements of relevant national quality assurance agencies is considered as part of programme/partnership approval and ongoing programme delivery.
- [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) and the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES). Data from these surveys feeds into module and programme 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 then 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 (Continuous Programme Performance Review (CPPR) and Module Evaluation) which are underpinned by a continuous improvement philosophy whereby good practice is shared and areas for improvement identified.
- 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.
- The Teaching Innovation Group (TIG) and Education Leaders Group (ELG). The TIG is an informal community with responsibility for educational innovation and enhancement. ELG considers emerging teaching issues reporting in to formal governance structures to inform strategy.
- Northumbria's Education Quality Enhancement Fund ([EQEF](#)) and Northumbria Distinguished Teaching Fellowships (NUDTF) provide individual and collaborative awards for enhancement projects.
- Student-Led award scheme run by the Students' Union where students nominate staff members for awards.
- 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 Information](#), complemented by its [Access and Participation Plan](#) (APP), details its admission processes underpinned by the following aims:

- 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 Plan 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 (initial and extended) and On-boarding of students

There is an extensive information, support, familiarisation and induction programme for all students, differentiated to recognise the diversity of the student population, including year of study, subject, domicile and previous experience of higher education. The central activities are supplemented by department and programme level events which are extended across





the semester. The offer includes promotion of social events and activities and a series of academic skills workshops.

### 7.3 Student Success and Achievement

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](#) and the Programme Assessment Board 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 the fairness of its assessment processes. The role of the External Examiner and process and criteria for appointment are clearly articulated in the [External Examiner Policy](#). 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 Team.

## 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.
- [Learning and Teaching Development \(CPD\)](#) programme.
- [Peer Observation and Support](#) scheme.
- [Distinguished Teaching Fellowship and Enhancement](#) projects 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.

Arrangements for [Postgraduate Graduate Research \(PGR\) Teaching](#) are clearly defined to support PGR students recruited to undertake teaching, learning and assessment activity.

Northumbria's [Academic Careers Framework](#), which comprises an Education and Research pathway, provides the opportunity for staff to progress from Assistant Professor, to Associate Professor, to Professor managed through an annual Academic Development Review process.



## 9 Learning resources, student support and experience

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 continuation, completion and progression to graduate level employment or further study. 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 Engagement Monitoring Policy](#).
- An institutional approach to the structure and digital delivery of student handbooks.
- Specific teams within Student, Library and Academic Services including:
  - [Student Life and Wellbeing](#).
  - [Student Engagement](#) (including 24/7 Ask4Help service). The team supports student continuation through use of education 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 [Review Framework](#).

**Periodic Review**<sup>2</sup> is currently designed to take place over a 6 -year cycle at departmental level and make 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.

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<sup>2</sup> Periodic Review is currently being reconsidered to factor in changes to the regulatory landscape, including the Office for Students 'B' Conditions and the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF).



**Continuous Programme Performance Review (CPPR)** is an evidence-based process, structured around three cyclical review periods linked to the release of key data sets including NSS, Graduate Outcomes data, module outcomes data and external examiner and student feedback. Covering all provision it facilitates timely, in-year interventions to resolve issues and identify good practice across the academic year. It is a key mechanism by which the University manages quality and standards, with benchmarked performance metrics (including split metrics).

**Module evaluation** questionnaires are issued after each module delivery and along with Student Staff programme committees are the key mechanism for securing student feedback for programme review.

**Postgraduate Research** provision is currently scheduled to be 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.