



ZEST! Essentials:

Academic Quality and Standards

Contents

	Page
1. Who is this guide for?	2
2. Why do lecturers need to keep up to date about academic quality and standards?	3
2.1 Funding	3
2.2 Equivalence of qualifications	3
2.3 Establishing academic quality and standards	3
2.4 From assurance to enhancement	4
2.5 Activities	4
2.6 Sources of information	5
3. What quality processes does GCU use?	6
3.1 Activities	6
3.2 Source of information	6
4. How do the quality processes work?	7
4.1 Module development, approval, quality assurance and enhancement	7
4.2 Student evaluation and feedback mechanisms	7
4.3 Programme monitoring	7
4.4 Programme approval and re-approval	8
4.5 Enhancement-Led Internal Subject Review (ELISR)	8
4.6 Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR)	8
4.7 Activities	8
4.8 Sources of information	9
5. Professional development	10
5.1 Activities	10
5.2 Source of information	10
6. Where can I get more information?	11

ZEST! Essentials:

Principles of Student Assessment

1 Who is this guide for?

Several different groups of staff may wish to access this guide for different purposes eg

- New lecturers who are seeking an overview of national and institutional quality procedures and processes;
- Lecturers who are enrolled on the Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (PgC LTHE) and who wish to gain an understanding of these procedures and process. These lecturers should also gain an appreciation of their actual and potential contribution to the successful operation of the academic quality procedures and processes.
- Experienced lecturers seeking an update on recent changes in these procedures and processes.

This is not a definitive guide. It is intended to raise general issues of interest and/or concern to lecturers in Scottish higher education and to explain how these issues are dealt with in Glasgow Caledonian University in particular. Section 2 of this guide is about the Scottish, British and European dimensions to quality and standards in higher education. It also touches on the importance of the sector in the Scottish economy. Those who have only very limited time or are only interested in this university's policies and procedures should go straight to section 3.

2 Why do lecturers need to keep up to date about academic quality and standards?

This is a question that can be answered on many levels with different meanings for different stakeholders. Consider the following aspects of higher education:

2.1 Funding

Higher education costs a lot of money (in Scotland £1.3 billion in 2005/06) which comes from taxpayers through the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Funding Council (SFC)¹. They want to be assured that this money is wisely spent.

2.2 Equivalence of qualifications

At national level students, staff, employers and funders want to know that a degree from Glasgow Caledonian University is of equal value compared with a degree from, say, Edinburgh University. The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) has been developed to ensure that the same credit-rating system is applied to all Scottish qualifications from Access Level 1 in schools to PhD in universities. It does this by providing qualifications descriptors which explain, in broad terms, what a student at each of these levels should be able to know and do. Because of the unique four year structure of the Scottish Honours degree it is difficult to make similar comparisons with the rest of the UK.

Internationally the UK, as a whole, is a participant in the Bologna process. This process began in 1999 with the signing of the Bologna Declaration by European Ministers of Education and continues seeking to establish a European system of credit accumulation and transfer.

Establishing equivalence of qualifications makes transitions across different sectors of education (school, college, university) in Scotland easier. Internationally it enables student mobility across borders. Equivalence is also an aid for employers in interpreting qualifications.

2.3 Establishing academic quality and standards

In the UK, the Quality Assurance Agency for higher education (QAA), working with Universities UK, has overall responsibility for establishing and monitoring standards. There is a published Code of Practice for all areas of academic quality and standards, including student support, which must be adhered to. Similarly, there are

¹ The SFC was formed in 2005 by the merger of the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council and the Scottish Further Education Funding Council

published benchmark statements for subject groupings against which all UK degrees can be measured.

2.4 From assurance to enhancement

The conventional approach to Quality Assurance is retrospective. However in 1997 the Dearing Report from The National Committee of Enquiry into Higher Education, and the Garrick Report from the Scottish Committee proposed many major changes in UK higher education. Since then a whole new approach to quality issues has been evolving.

Education is a devolved issue and there is increasing divergence among the approaches adopted to quality and standards in different parts of the UK. In Scotland the key players are the SFC, Universities Scotland (a regional grouping of Universities UK) and QAA Scotland. They have worked together to create processes which encourage institutions to develop and monitor their own approaches to quality enhancement and to share best practice across the sector.

A programme of external Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR) has been initiated. Section 4.6 of this guide gives more information on ELIR. Subject reviews which previously were external are now conducted at institutional level in a process called Enhancement-Led Internal Subject Review (ELISR). This is covered in section 4.5 of this guide. On sharing best practice across the sector the SFC has funded collaborative national projects on selected enhancement themes. International national experts contribute to developing these enhancement themes and all Scottish HEIs are expected to implement the outcomes.

2.5 Activities

- 1 Have a quick scan through the Scottish Executive, SFC and Universities Scotland websites to get an idea of the scope of Scottish HE eg costs, numbers of higher education institutions (HEIs), numbers of students. What is the role of the Scottish Executive in the sector?
- 2 Look up the SCQF website and find the qualifications descriptors for Scottish higher education (SCQF levels). How meaningful are these descriptors for you in the context of your teaching? From the case studies given, how well does the framework support students making transitions to different parts of our educational system?
- 3 From the Bologna Secretariat website look up the Copernicus Consultation Paper under latest news. What is the purpose of this consultation paper and do you understand what this means?

- 4 Subject benchmark statements are to be found on the QAA website. Have a look at the one(s) that most closely match the subject(s) you teach. How useful are these statements to you?
- 5 The SFC is funding enhancement themes to promote sharing of best practice in Scottish HE. From the enhancement themes website, how many themes have been funded since 2003 and what are they? Identify and consider which are relevant to you in your current role.
- 6 Since 2003 the focus in Scotland has been on enhancement-led quality assurance. From the QAA Scotland website, identify the five elements of enhancement-led quality assurance applied in ELIR.

2.6 Sources of information

Bologna Secretariat

Enhancement Themes

Quality Assurance Agency for higher education

Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework

Scottish Executive

Scottish Funding Council

Universities Scotland

Sections 3 and 4 of this guide are about GCU processes. Full information on these processes can be found on the Quality Office @ GCU website.

3 What quality processes does GCU use?

The Quality Office is responsible for co-ordinating activities to support the key components of the University's Quality Enhancement Strategy and commitment in the Strategic Plan to the 'continuous improvement of learning and teaching'. Each School has an Associate Dean Quality (ADQ) who works with the Quality Office.

Information on the Quality Enhancement Strategy and its implementation is contained in the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook. The other key document is the University Qualifications Framework which interprets the SCQF in the context of GCU and the qualifications it awards.

Within GCU the Quality Office is also committed to the dissemination of good practice which it does through its website.

3.1 Activities

- 1 On the Quality Office website how is enhancement defined?
- 2 What roles and responsibilities does the Quality Office fulfill?
- 3 Find an example of good practice in school-based learning support. Could you use this approach in your school?

3.2 Source of information

[Quality Office @ GCU](#)

4 How do the quality processes work?

Quality assurance and enhancement processes apply at School, Department/Division, Programme, Module and lecturer levels. As a new lecturer you will be involved in some of the following processes:

4.1 Module development, approval, quality assurance and enhancement

Lecturers contribute to quality assurance and enhancement through their teaching, learning support and student assessment roles. They are responsible for ensuring that their contribution to modules is up to date, of the right standard and of a high quality. Ideas for enhancement should be shared with colleagues. External Assessors may give feedback on the operation of a module which can be used for future guidance. Module leaders pool all this information and report on their modules in the annual monitoring process which is the collective term for quality assurance and enhancement.

The need for a new module or changes to an existing module may arise in the context of a programme, ELISR or independently. The quality assurance processes applied will depend on the context and extent of change required. As you become more experienced you will become more involved in these processes.

4.2 Student evaluation and feedback mechanisms

At programme level, lecturers and students both have responsibility for participating in Student Staff Consultative Groups (SSCGs) to discuss issues of mutual interest or concern, and to gather feedback from students about any aspect of their programme. Lecturers use this forum to report back on action taken to resolve issues raised by students at previous meetings.

At module level there is an online University Module Feedback Questionnaire (MFQ) which students should be encouraged to complete. Lecturers can supplement this information with their own evaluation and feedback processes.

4.3 Programme monitoring

Programme monitoring is carried out annually by the Programme Board which is required to consider specified topics and performance indicators. One outcome of this process is the production of a continuous quality improvement plan and, if necessary, an action plan for the programme.

4.4 Programme approval and re-approval

There is a detailed procedure for programme approval beginning with the creation of a Programme Development Board and leading to a report by a Programme Approval Panel listing conclusions from the approval event. Requirements are issues which must be addressed, and recommendations are issues which must be considered before the programme can be approved. Subsequent procedures culminate in programme approval and submission of the Approved Programme Documentation to the Quality Office.

Programme re-approval will be required if a programme is reviewed and changed significantly. A similar process applies.

4.5 Enhancement-Led Internal Subject Review (ELISR)

The ELISR process usually takes place at School level and includes all university provision in a specific subject area eg health and social care. The process operates on a five-year cycle so every subject taught within the university will be covered in that period of five years. If possible, programme review and approval will be subsumed within ELISR. Key features of the ELISR process are the production of a Self-Evaluation Document, a Review Event, resulting in a Review Report and any follow-up action required in response to the Review Report.

4.6 Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR)

QAA Scotland has a brief guide to ELIR for staff in higher education institutions. It describes the process as follows:

“The main focus of review is the institution's strategy for continually improving the student learning experience. It also examines an institution's ability to manage the standards of its academic awards and the quality of the learning opportunities it provides for its students.”

4.7 Activities

- 1 What is the purpose of a module descriptor?
- 2 Who attends a SSCG? What are the items discussed when it meets? How often are they held?
- 3 What are the performance indicators the Programme Board must consider in the programme monitoring process?
- 4 How well do the programmes on which you teach match the SCQF levels descriptors?

- 5 Find the flowchart for approval of the Programme Proposal Pro-forma (PPP) for a new programme. What is the next stage in the Programme Approval Process?
- 6 What is the scope of ELISR?
- 7 Information on ELIR can be found on the QAA Scotland website. What happens in an institutional review?

4.8 Sources of information

Quality Assurance Agency for higher education

Quality Office @ GCU

Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework

5 Professional development

This study guide has been about finding factual information. You should not have found this too difficult but there is a purpose ie what does it all mean to a new lecturer?

5.1 Activities

- 1 Read Judy McKimm's chapter on Assuring quality and standards of teaching in Fry et al (eds) *A Handbook for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* 2nd edition. How would you answer the questions posed in the Interrogating Practice boxes?
- 2 Reflect, in broad terms, on what you have learned in working through this study guide and what the implications are for your professional development as a lecturer in higher education.
- 3 For students on the PgC LTHE, consider how you can use this new-found knowledge in terms of the learning objectives and assessment criteria for Learning Goal B of the programme.

5.2 Source of information

McKimm, J (2003) Assuring quality and standards in teaching, in Fry, H et al (eds) *A Handbook for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* 2nd ed RoutledgeFalmer

6 Where can I get more information?

McKimm, J (2003) Assuring quality and standards in teaching, in Fry, H et al (eds) *A Handbook for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* 2nd ed RoutledgeFalmer

Bologna Secretariat
<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/bologna/>

Dearing and Garrick Reports
<http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/ncihe/>

Enhancement Themes
<http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/>

Quality Assurance Agency for higher education
<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/>

Quality Office @ GCU
<http://www.gcal.ac.uk/quality/index.html>

Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework
<http://www.scqf.org.uk/>

Scottish Executive
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Education>

Scottish Funding Council
<http://www.sfc.ac.uk/>

Universities Scotland
<http://www.universities-scotland.ac.uk/>