



**HEFCE Annual Provider Review 2016**

<p><b>Outcome requested:</b></p>	<p>Council is asked to <b>consider</b> the update on QMUL’s compliance with HEFCE’s revised operating model for quality assessment (full details of the operating model are available at <a href="http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2016/201603">www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2016/201603</a>).</p> <p>Council is asked to <b>consider</b> in particular the evidence and proposed action plan for it to provide full assurances to HEFCE on 1 December 2016 in relation to the continuous improvement of the student academic experience, student outcomes and the reliability of degree standards.</p>
<p><b>Executive Summary:</b></p>	<p>This paper summarises the evidence and action plan considered and endorsed by Senate to enable Council to provide full assurance in response to the following statements as part of QMUL’s annual accountability return to HEFCE on 1 December 2016:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the governing body has received and discussed a report and accompanying action plan relating to the continuous improvement of the student academic experience and student outcomes. This included evidence from the provider’s own periodic review processes, which fully involve students and include embedded external peer or professional review.</li> <li>• the methodologies used as a basis to improve the student academic experience and student outcomes are, to the best of our knowledge, robust and appropriate.</li> <li>• the standards of awards for which we are responsible have been appropriately set and maintained.</li> </ul> <p>Senate considered the evidence and action plan at its meeting on 13 October 2016 and recommends to Council that full assurance should be provided in response to the above statements of assurance.</p> <p>Council is asked to consider the evidence and action plans in relation to the statements of assurance and determine whether full or partial assurance can be given to HEFCE on 1 December 2016. HEFCE has made provision for partial assurance to be given in 2016-17 only; where partial assurance is given the return must accompany a statement on the areas in which the governing body is unable to provide full assurance, to be followed up by a visit from HEFCE in early 2017.</p>
<p><b>QMUL Strategy: strategic aim reference and sub-strategies [e.g., SA1.1]</b></p>	<p>Strategic Aim 3: to provide all our students, wherever based, an education that is judged internationally to be of the highest quality, and which exploits innovations in teaching, learning and assessment.</p>

<b>Internal/External regulatory/statutory reference points:</b>	HEFCE Memorandum of Assurance and Accountability Quality Assurance Agency, <i>UK Quality Code for Higher Education</i> European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, <i>Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area</i> Committee of University Chairs, <i>The Higher Education Code of Governance</i>
<b>Strategic Risks:</b>	Aligns with strategic risks: 2.01 High quality student experience throughout the student life cycle. 7. 01 Design and delivery of high quality portfolio of programmes. 9. 01 Reputational development and external relations 10.01 Partnerships 13.01 Maintain effective and constructive governance.
<b>Equality Impact Assessment:</b>	None required. Consideration of academic outcomes for different student groups is embedded in QMUL's academic quality assurance arrangements.
<b>Subject to prior and onward consideration by:</b>	Senate, 13 October 2016
<b>Confidential paper under FOIA/DPA</b>	No
<b>Timing:</b>	For assurances to be given by 1 December 2016.
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<b>Date:</b>	18 October 2016
<b>Senior Management/External Sponsor</b>	Professor Simon Gaskell, President and Principal

## HEFCE Annual Provider Review

### Background

1. HEFCE published initial details of its revised operating model for external quality assessment in March 2016 ([www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2016/201603](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2016/201603)), with further updates in August 2016. The revised model significantly reduces the burden of external quality assessment and mirrors QMUL's own approach in recognising that academic quality assurance should not be considered as a separate work stream for the purposes of external scrutiny. QMUL's Academic Framework has a clear focus on the provision of assurances at every level on the issues that matter most to students: degree standards, student outcomes and the academic experience.

### Council's role in academic assurance

2. Council has debated its role in academic assurance recently in the context of the Council Effectiveness Review and Academic Governance Review, and Council's adoption of the CUC Code of Governance. Council also heard a presentation on academic governance at its meeting in October 2015. Senate is nominated in the Charter as the body responsible for the academic activity of QMUL, subject to the general superintendence and control of Council, which is itself regulated by its commitment, through the CUC Code of Governance, to the principles of collegiality and academic freedom.

3. The QMUL Academic Framework, included in the additional reading for this meeting, assigns responsibility to the Vice-Principals as individuals (for the management of academic quality and standards in the faculties, and for the development of cross-cutting academic strategies) and to a small number of boards (dealing with the standards of academic awards, the quality of the academic experience, curriculum approval and review, postgraduate research, academic partnerships, and research ethics). Senate's role is to hold the Vice-Principals and the chairs of boards to account, as well as to decide on matters of principle, whereas Council's role is to seek assurance that Senate is performing this role effectively.

4. The Academic Governance Review, considered by Council in April 2016, concluded that QMUL has a comprehensive framework of academic governance that provides structured opportunities for members of staff and students to engage on issues at all levels of the institution and conforms to sector expectations. Some aspects of the framework were clarified or strengthened as a result of the review. The Council Effectiveness Review, considered by Council in January 2015, identified a need for members of Council to receive additional information on the academic business of QMUL to gain assurance that Senate is fulfilling the responsibilities given to it in the Charter and Ordinances. This is being addressed by reviewing the content and scope of the presentations to Council from the Vice-Principals and the written reports from Senate, and through additional items in the annual cycle of business on issues such as student complaints and appeals. The most recent effectiveness survey indicated that this is work in progress.

### Assurances

5. As part of HEFCE's new model of external quality assessment, Council will be asked to provide the following assurances on academic quality and standards in its annual accountability return on 1 December 2016.

*6. The governing body has received and discussed a report and accompanying action plan relating to the continuous improvement of the student academic experience and student outcomes. This included evidence from the providers own periodic review processes which fully involve students and include embedded external peer or professional review.*

Evidence for assurance:

- The evidence is spread across the annual cycle of business, rather than being presented as a single report.

- Council receives regular reports from Senate with supplementary background reading which includes details of student survey results (NSS, PTES, PRES, QMSS), sub-strategies related to the student experience (e.g. Student Engagement, Retention and Success Strategy) and student outcomes.
- Council considered a detailed report on student casework (appeals, complaints, assessment offences, discipline and fitness to practise) at the meeting of 5 April 2016. Council had previously received the report on cases referred to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator; this more comprehensive report on casework provided assurance that student complaints were addressed effectively and that the wellbeing of students was secured.
- Council receives regular reports from the Vice-Principal (Student Experience, Teaching and Learning) which provide Council with a report and accompanying action plan relating to the continuous improvement of the student experience.
- Council receives regular reports from the Vice-Principal (Research) which inform Council members on the research student experience and provide information on research student outcomes and completion rates.
- The Vice-Principals and Executive Deans also make annual reports to Council which include matters relating to the student experience and the quality of provision.

#### Action for 2016-17:

- Strategic Planning will prepare an annual report on student outcomes, with appropriate sector benchmarking, for 2017 onwards. This report will be available for consideration by the Education Quality Board (May 2017), Senate (June 2017) and Council (July 2017).
- Council members have been invited to participate in periodic reviews as observers from 2016 onwards. This opportunity will provide members with more context on the operation of the process and its role in the continuous improvement of students' academic experience. Issues emerging from periodic reviews are monitored through the academic governance framework and reports of periodic reviews will be provided for Council members' information as background reading.

### *7. The methodologies used as a basis to improve the student academic experience and student outcomes are, to the best of our knowledge, robust and appropriate.*

#### Evidence for assurance:

- Council receives regular updates from the Vice-Principals on the mechanisms used to improve the student academic experience and student outcomes.
- Council received a presentation on academic governance at its meeting in October 2015. This presentation formed part of an ongoing aspiration to strengthen the interaction between Council and Senate, while noting that Senate already provides Council with appropriate assurance in relation to academic risks.

#### Action for 2016-17:

- The Academic Registry and Council Secretariat will offer an additional programme of presentations to Council members to enhance their understanding of the methodologies used for the enhancement of the student academic experience and the improvement of student outcomes. This is linked to the assurance related to the European Standards and Guidelines (2015), described in paragraph 9 below.
- The Education Quality Board has approved the development of a web-based Education Manual which will house all policies related to teaching, learning and the student experience. It is intended that this resource will be of use to both staff and external audiences, providing accessible information on QMUL's approach to the management of academic standards and the quality of the student experience.

8. *The standards of awards for which we are responsible have been appropriately set and maintained.*

Evidence for assurance:

- Each subject examination board for taught programmes has an external examiner to ensure that academic standards have been appropriately set and maintained against sector benchmarks. Issues raised by external examiners are addressed by the relevant school/institute and reports are monitored by the Vice-Principal (Student Experience, Teaching and Learning) and by the Academic Registry and Council Secretariat. Panels for research degree examinations include external members. Potential risks to academic standards are monitored by Senate and reported to Council where necessary.
- Each Degree Examination Board has an external member who provides a report on the effectiveness of QMUL's mechanisms for maintaining academic standards. The Education Quality Board considers this report and any emerging issues would be referred on to Senate for further consideration, with reference to Council if the issues were deemed to be sufficiently serious.

Action for 2016-17:

- Council members will receive the external examiners' overview report and reports from external members of the Degree Examination Boards in their background reading.
- The report from Strategic Planning (referred to in the action for 2.1) will provide additional information on student attainment with relevant benchmarking information.

9. In next year's submission, due on 1 December 2017 and relating to activity during the 2016-17 academic year, Council will also be asked to provide assurance that 'the governing body has received a report that confirms that the provider continues to meet the standards of Part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines (2015)'. The Education Quality Board will consider a detailed mapping of QMUL's compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines (2015) on behalf of Senate. Council will receive a briefing on the report in order to enable it to provide the appropriate assurances in December 2017.

## **Recommendations**

11. In this first year of the new assurance model, governing bodies are permitted to report either full or partial assurance, while noting that full assurance will generally include within it an element of work in progress. Where partial assurance is given, HEFCE will follow up with a visit to the institution to satisfy itself that appropriate and adequate action is being taken. On the basis of a discussion at its meeting 13 October 2016, Senate recommends that full assurance can be given to HEFCE in each of the three specified areas.

12. This paper has been brought to Council in advance of the meeting in November 2016, when the annual accountability return will be discussed in its entirety again, to enable members of Council to request clarification or additional information, or to suggest additional actions in 2016-17. This is especially relevant if there are areas in which Council may be minded to give partial, rather than full assurance.

Jane Pallant  
Deputy Academic Registrar  
October 2016