

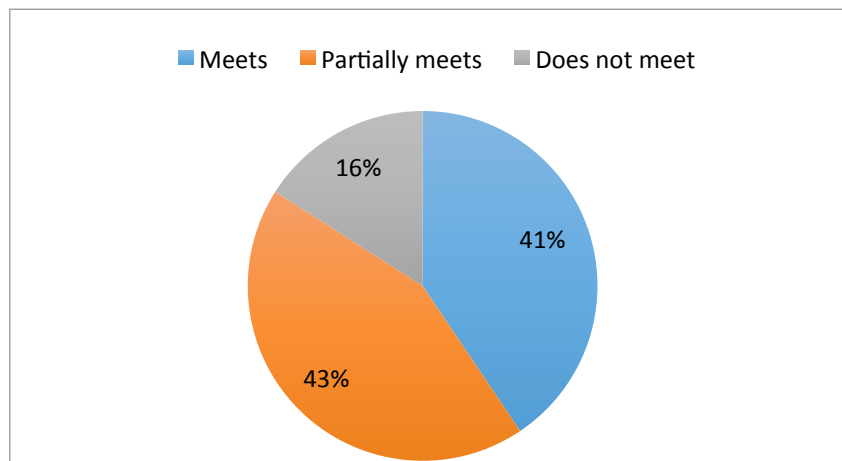
HSS QMplus Audit Report (Baseline Standards)

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HSS QMplus Audit Report (Baseline Standards)

1. Executive Summary

1. A QMplus audit was carried out on over 400 modules within HSS during August and September 2019.
2. This was the first audit of this kind that the E-Learning Unit has conducted on QMplus module areas.
3. Five (5) students were hired to complete the audit.
4. 284 hours were required to complete the audit, averaging 40 minutes per module.
5. The Audit was based on the QMplus Baseline Standards and focused on 4 main criteria:
 - a. Course design and layout
 - b. Communication process
 - c. Assessment information
 - d. Course review and recording
6. Accessibility was also considered, but was not a main focus for this audit. Accessibility will need to be considered in future audits.
7. Audited modules were scored and then placed in one of 3 categories:
 - a. Meets the QMplus Baseline Standards
 - b. Partially meets the QMplus Baseline Standards
 - c. Does not meet the QMplus Baseline Standards
8. The results:



9. There are a few lessons learned and recommendations, including the timing of the audit – which was considered to be very tight.
10. Next steps have been outlined in this report and include: conducting a QMplus-wide audit, creating/updating QMplus school templates and showcasing innovative practice.
11. The intention of the baseline standards audit was to highlight areas that fall below the minimum and showcase innovative practice. It is up to the individual Schools to consider how to address low scores.

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2. Introduction

During the summer of 2019, the Faculty Education Manager for HSS contacted the Head of E-Learning for assistance in conducting a review of HSS modules on QMplus, to ensure that these areas were meeting the needs of students.

In response, the E-Learning Unit assisted with the recruitment of student E-Learning Assistants to conduct an audit of a sample of QMplus modules for HSS. The HSS Faculty Education Manager provided the sample of courses to be audited and the courses were audited using a [QMplus Baseline Standards checklist](#)¹ (see appendix B).

3. The QMplus Baseline Standards

Driven by student feedback, the QMplus Baseline Standards are a set of minimum criteria that is expected of all QMplus online module areas. These standards were developed in response to the 2016/17 E-Learning Unit's student survey², where a significant number of student respondents commented on QMplus modules areas and the need for:

- Improved layout
- Simpler navigation
- Less clutter
- Better content organisation
- Removal of out-dated content as well as irrelevant and broken links

The baseline standards were originally developed to:

1. Ensure consistent provision of core information and resources in QMplus for all students across QMUL.
2. Help to achieve strategic objectives around teaching, learning and the student experience.
3. Support schools in delivering a quality online learning experience for their students.
4. Update and build upon the existing School and Faculty policies around e-learning and QMplus, originally developed in 2012 with the introduction of QMplus.

In 2018/19 the E-Learning Unit launched its QMplus Baseline Standards and piloted it within a few schools on a voluntary basis. Schools who participated in the pilot were broadly positive, with one school deciding to create a new template for their QMplus module areas.

The QMplus Baseline Standards have been further refined in light of feedback from Faculties and Schools, to include local practices. More information is available on our [website](#).

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The screenshot displays the QMplus interface for a module titled "BUILDING THE AMERICAN NATION: 1776-1896 - 2019/20". The page is organized into several sections:

- Learning Log Portals:** A message from the History Office regarding submission portals.
- Module Content:** A list of 12 weekly topics, including "WEEK ONE: A REVOLUTIONARY MOMENT, 1776-1789" and "WEEK TWELVE: THE NATURE OF THE NATION".
- Module Info:** Details such as "Code: Module code", "Level: 4", "Credit value: 15", and "Semester: A".
- School Policies:** A list of policies including "Teaching ethics, attributes of a historian, and assessment criteria", "Attendance and Absence Policy", "Coursework Policy", and "Formatting Essays".
- Accessibility:** A section with icons for accessibility features and a "Launch ATBar" button.
- Settings:** Options for "Course administration" and "Site administration".
- Navigation:** Buttons for "HELP & SUPPORT", "QMPLUS MEDIA", "QMPLUS HUB", and "QMPLUS ARCHIVE".
- Footer:** A navigation menu with categories like "STUDENT LIFE", "HELP & SUPPORT", "LIBRARY", and "QMPLUS ARCHIVE", along with a "Log out" button.

Figure 1:
QMplus Baseline Standards exemplar module

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4. The HSS Audit

In August and September 2019, an audit of over 400 QMplus module areas was carried out within the following HSS schools:

1. School of Business Management
2. School of English and Drama
3. School of Languages Linguistics and Film
4. School of Politics and International Relations
5. School of Law

The School of History subsequently requested for some of their module areas to also be reviewed, and this was carried out separately in November 2019. We have also been asked to carry out a similar audit for the School of Geography, which we hope to complete before June 2020. This is not included in this report.

The audit focused primarily on the following 4 main aspects:

1. Course design and layout

Is core information present (module information, office hours, contact details etc.)? Is the structure clear (named topics/sections, file structure, sub-headings etc.)?

2. Communication process

Is it clear how students will receive notifications from staff, as well as how they will contact staff and communicate with other students? For example, are the online forums or a module announcement forum available in the module area?

3. Assessment information

Is assessment information included on QMplus (even if the assessment is not taking place on QMplus)? Is core information about the assessment present (dates, deadlines, how to submit, what to submit etc.)? Is there supporting assessment documentation (samples, past papers, cover sheets, instructions etc.)? Is it clear how grades and feedback will be received?

4. Course review and recordings

Are lecture slides or notes available? Are lecture recordings available? Are reading lists available?

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QMplus Baseline Standards Checklist			
ITEM	DETAILS	DNM / Partial Meet / Ex	Notes
1 - COURSE DESIGN			
Module Information	<i>QMplus module information block should be present and located in the top right hand side of the page for consistency</i>		
	Is the module information block being used?		
	Is the module information displayed prominently on the page?		
	Does it include?:		
	- Module name		
	- Module code		
	- Credit value		
	- Staff name(s) i.e. module convenor and/or teacher		
	- Staff contact details (email address as a minimum)		
	- Office hours/hours available		
	- Information about the schedule or timetable (or a relevant link to this information)		
	- Information about learning outcomes or module aims (or a relevant link to this information)		
Course Content/Structure	<i>Faculty or school template should be used so structure is consistent with other course areas</i>		
	Is the course divided up into topics/sections?		
	Have the topics/sections been given meaningful names?		
	If there are files being used, have the files been given meaningful names?		
	Are files up to date?		
	Is a faculty or school template used (is it consistent with other QMplus courses within the same faculty/school)?		
<i>Suggested</i>	Are meaningful subheadings topics/sections used (example readings, lectures, resources, learning outcomes etc.)?		
<i>Suggested</i>	Are QMplus pages or books used to display large amounts of text, or video clips etc.?		
2 - COMMUNICATION			
Communication process	<i>The QMplus news forum should be used to notify students of important information regarding the course</i>		
	Is it clear how students will receive notifications from staff (for example, is a QMplus news forum being used within the course area)?		
	Baseline+: Is the news forum displayed at the top in topic zero?		
	Is it clear how students should contact staff?		
	Is it clear how students can communicate with other students (for example, is there a general QMplus forum/message board)?		

Figure 1:
Section of the Baseline Standards checklist used for the HSS audit. See appendix B.

We also asked the students to consider accessibility when they were completing their audit, but this was not a primary focus of their audit. A separate audit will need to be carried out across QMplus to look at accessibility in more depth. The students were asked to look at the following:

Accessibility

Has accessibility been considered (e.g. font, colours, image descriptions, filenames, tables)?

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5. The Results

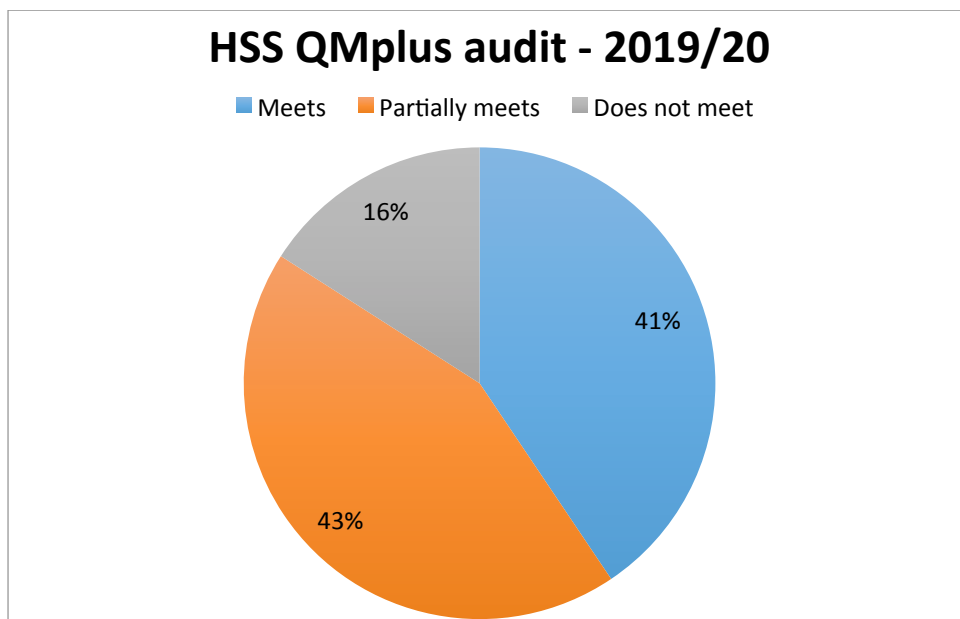
The faculty hired 5 students to complete the audit and the students were trained and managed by the E-Learning Unit.

The students were asked to score the QMplus module areas using the QMplus Baseline Standards checklist (see Appendix B). Based on the scores, the QMplus modules were then ranked into 3 categories:

1. Meets the Standards
2. Partially meets the Standards
3. Does not meet the Standards

Below is a summary of the audit:

School	Number of Courses Audited	Meet Standards	Partially Meets % Standards	Does Not Meet % Standards	%		
SBM	8	7	88%	1	13%	0	0%
SED	160	35	22%	106	66%	19	12%
SLLF	165	57	35%	62	38%	46	28%
LAW	28	25	86%	2	7%	1	4%
SPIR	45	37	82%	8	18%	0	0%
HIST	8	7	86%	1	13%	0	0%
	414	168	41%	180	43%	66	16%



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'Exceeds the standards'

The students were also asked to identify aspects of module areas that they felt were particularly useful, for example, were there any activities within the module area that they felt would be beneficial to see across all QMplus module areas. They additionally marked module areas where there were such activities as 'exceeds standards' and added comments in their review to highlight why they felt this way (see Appendix A).

School	Number of Courses Audited	Exceeds Standards*	%
SBM	8	0	0%
SED	160	10	6%
SLLF	165	17	10%
LAW	28	14	50%
SPIR	45	23	51%
HIST	8	0	0%
	414	64	15%

*Additional notes:

It should be noted that the 'Exceeds Standards' section was the students' personal judgement on what they felt was good practice. Some aspects of good practice identified by the students in some module areas included:

1. Clear assessment instructions – such as additional information about how to submit online assignments, which may include a short video for students to watch.
2. All assessment information in one place, as opposed to dotted across the module
3. A timetable in the top area of the module, which highlighted which topic would be covered in which week for the lecture as well as for the seminar. The students commented that sometimes the topic is not the same for these and having the timetable was useful.
4. Topic/section names that include the week as well as the topic title.
5. A forum for student discussions that was moderated and checked regularly by the teacher, possibly with prompting questions.
6. A template for consistency. One school in particular seemed to lack consistency, which was felt to be as a result of them not having, or not using a school template.

More comments are in Appendix A.

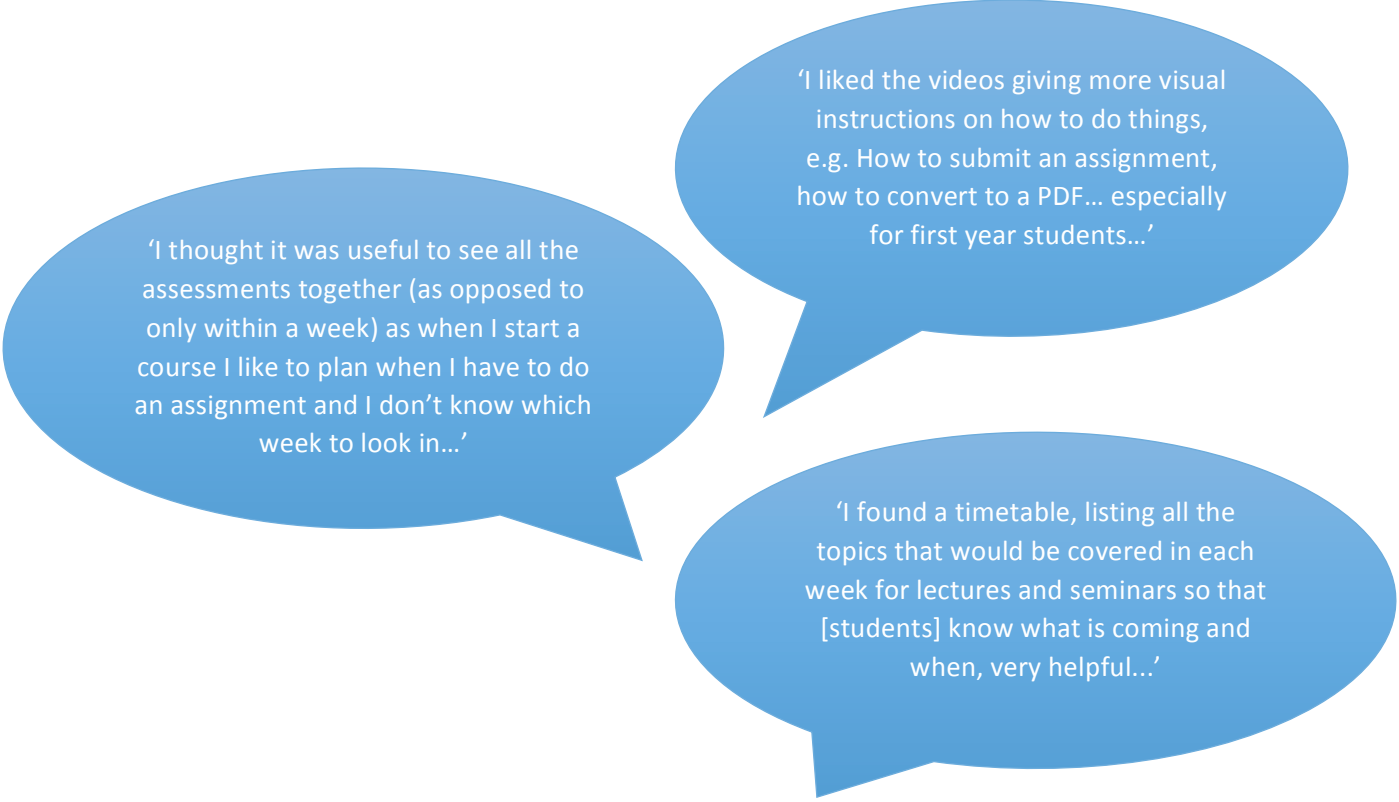
In reviewing the results of the audit, in some schools where scores were low (partially meets the standards or did not meet the standards) it is understood that not all criteria in the QMplus Baseline Standards are applicable for all QMplus modules. For example, it might not be appropriate to release

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Q-Review recordings for some modules, or students are given information about how to contact staff during the class rather than on QMplus. In these cases, these modules would have received a lower score against our baseline checklist, but there may be a reason why this is the case.

The full results of the audit, including the individual module area scores against the E-Learning QMplus Baseline Standards checklist, have been sent to the Faculty Education Manager for review. Further information about the results can be obtained from the HSS Faculty Education Manager.

We met with the students after the audit to gain some insight about the process. We asked them for feedback about the QMplus module areas they reviewed, such as what they felt was useful or not. Some students' comments are available in appendix A.



'I thought it was useful to see all the assessments together (as opposed to only within a week) as when I start a course I like to plan when I have to do an assignment and I don't know which week to look in...'

'I liked the videos giving more visual instructions on how to do things, e.g. How to submit an assignment, how to convert to a PDF... especially for first year students...'

'I found a timetable, listing all the topics that would be covered in each week for lectures and seminars so that [students] know what is coming and when, very helpful...'

Some comments by the student auditors. More comments in Appendix A

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6. What worked well, lessons learned and our recommendations

This was the first audit of such a large scale that the E-Learning Unit has conducted on QMplus module areas. As a result, there were a few lessons learned as well as some tips that were picked up along the way.

1. What worked well:

- 1.1. Having students as auditors meant that they were able to give their perspective as a QMUL student, which we found very useful.
- 1.2. The students received a 2-hour training before the audit, where they were shown a selection of QMplus modules and the QMplus Baseline Standards checklist. This gave them the opportunity to ask questions, and to get to know each other.
- 1.3. An online area was created where students could also ask questions once the work started, and they were able to offer advice to each other. This worked well, and they were able to help each other online.
- 1.4. The students came together at the end of the audit period and were able to share their findings and provide useful recommendations. They were able to exchange ideas of what they felt were exceptionally good QMplus module areas. This resulted in a discussion about what is a 'good' QMplus module area for students.

2. Lessons Learned:

- 2.1. The bulk of the audit was completed in August and September 2019. This was very close to the start of the term and there wasn't time to give feedback or make any corrections to new module areas starting in 2019/20. Where improvements could have been made, this was not done (and was not within the scope of this audit).
- 2.2. We were asked to complete the audit by the end of September. This resulted in the audit being rushed – the students had around 5 weeks to complete the work.
- 2.3. As the audit started in August, some QMplus modules were going through the end of year processes (being 'rolled over') in preparation for the next intake of students. It was therefore not feasible to conduct the audit on current live QMplus modules – so the audit was carried out on the 2018/19 QMplus archive site. Some module areas were not on the archive site and therefore the students were not able to audit them.
- 2.4. Students were given 'viewer' access to the module areas so that they could not see sensitive student data or make any changes to the modules. However, viewer access meant that some information was not accessible to them, such as Q-Review recordings and some assessment information. This was discovered after the audit started, and impacted their ability to score some module areas accurately.
- 2.5. The Faculty Education Manager gave us the list of courses to be audited. In some schools there were over 150 modules, whereas in other schools there were only a handful of modules (as little as 8). Where there were more modules being audited, we feel the results have more meaning, as there was a greater pool of modules to compare.
- 2.6. Students had to apply their personal judgement, especially when determining which module areas exceeded the standards. This personal judgement meant that some areas were seen as having good practice for one person, but another auditor may not have picked this up.

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3. We recommend that:
 - 3.1. Audits are carried out towards the end of an academic year so that enough time can be allocated to provide feedback and to make any adjustments, where feasible.
 - 3.2. Work is carried out over a longer period (depending on the number of modules to be audited, but 4-5 months felt more realistic).
 - 3.3. At least 2 or 3 students are hired to complete the audit and that they are given the opportunity to provide feedback together at the end, so they can share their ideas and findings.
 - 3.4. 2 students work on the same set of modules rather than on different modules (as they did for this audit). For e.g. one student could be a 'second marker' and the final score based on the average of both students.
 - 3.5. Staff are given context when feeding back the results, so that they understand the results and can determine whether the scoring reflects something that needs to be addressed or not for their particular areas. It may be that a module is scored low in the audit because the information was not present in QMplus, but there may be good reason for this (for example, having Q-Review recordings within QMplus may not be feasible for a Drama course). A follow up meeting with local school reps should be scheduled to discuss the results of the audit.
 - 3.6. A 2-hour face-to-face session is scheduled at the start of the audit for training and preparation
 - 3.7. Another 2-hour face-to-face session is scheduled at the end of the audit for sharing and feedback.

It was proposed by some staff that the auditors should be given some context about what to expect for some schools that do not use all aspects of QMplus and why some information on the checklist may not have been present. This is something to consider for future audits, although this may be difficult for us to do.

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7. Next Steps

We are currently in the process of developing an action plan, in particular for HSS but also for other schools over the next year or two.

We propose to:

1. Audit more QMplus modules within other schools – following a similar approach to that used for this audit.
2. Develop new school based QMplus templates based on the QMplus Baseline Standards, which include best practice recommendations as suggested by the students.
3. Offer additional support and assistance to module leaders on QMplus modules that did not meet the QMplus Baseline Standards.
4. Contact module leads for those areas that exceeded the standards to be able to showcase the module areas and write case studies.
5. Showcase innovative use of QMplus via various channels
6. Continue to refine the QMplus Baseline Standards based on student feedback, making it easier for staff to ensure that QMplus module areas are meeting the needs of our students.

We plan to complete the above by the end of the 2019/20 academic year. We hope that we will be able to roll out a QMplus wide audit with support from Faculties and Schools.

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Appendix A

Some comments from E-Learning Assistants who conducted the audit:

Activities that the students found useful:	
1	Students commented that in some modules there were videos giving more visual instructions on how to do things, e.g. How to submit an assignment, how to convert to a PDF. The students found that these videos on how to do activities very useful, especially for first year students.
2	Some students liked getting the module handbook in a .pdf format as they could download it and read it offline.
3	Topic labelling was good in some Politics module areas (student gave an example)
4	Good signposting and module structure
5	Useful to have all the assessments together (as opposed to only within a week, as when they start a course and like to plan when they have to do an assignment they won't necessarily know which week to look in). Not useful to have the assignments dotted around the course area as students can't find it
6	Tabbed format works well for grouping items together
7	Students liked having introductory text at the top as opposed to news forum items as sometimes the news forum message is out of date (such as a cancelled class, or assignment due post) and they preferred to see (brief) information about the course...if anything at all, at the top of the page.
8	Students liked to see an introductory video with teacher introducing the module – which was present in some module areas
9	One student commented that it would be nice to have a folder with all downloadable content in there so they can download them altogether instead of this content being dotted everywhere.
10	Students commented that they liked to see a timetable listing all the topics that would be covered in each week for lectures and seminar so that they knew what was coming when. (Student gave an example module area)
11	Students commented that they also liked the topic structure and naming in XXX module area as it was clear what the topic name was, and which week it was relevant for, for which lecture and which seminar (as this is sometimes different).
12	Talis, when used, was seen as very useful, especially as students do not necessarily know which edition to get. The students had not used Talis in their modules and some felt it would be useful.
Elements that the students didn't like:	
1	Some course areas had no student forums – students liked to see these, as they are good if used appropriately. The students felt that teachers should introduce forums to students, encourage posts, and regularly monitor and reply to posts
2	Students questioned how useful it was to dedicate so much space to the learning objectives (?) they explained that this is useful when choosing the module but not necessarily after you have already registered...
3	Some modules had lots of left over/empty sections. Teachers need to be shown how to get rid of topics and items that are not needed for students.
4	Use of imagery – not always appropriate (especially if not relevant or used properly)
5	For some courses there was no course template and therefore no consistency across courses. Different look/presentation across different modules/schools
6	In some modules where a template had been used there was template text still present

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Appendix B - QMplus Baseline Standards Checklist:

QMplus Baseline Standards Checklist			
ITEM	DETAILS	DNM / Partial Meet / Ex	Notes
1 - COURSE DESIGN			
Module Information	<i>QMplus module information block should be present and located in the top right hand side of the page for consistency</i>		
	Is the module information block being used?		
	Is the module information displayed prominently on the page?		
	Does it include?:		
	- Module name		
	- Module code		
	- Credit value		
	- Staff name(s) i.e. module convenor and/or teacher		
	- Staff contact details (email address as a minimum)		
	- Office hours/hours available		
	- Information about the schedule or timetable (or a relevant link to this information)		
	- Information about learning outcomes or module aims (or a relevant link to this information)		
Course Content/Structure	<i>Faculty or school template should be used so structure is consistent with other course areas</i>		
	Is the course divided up into topics/sections?		
	Have the topics/sections been given meaningful names?		
	If there are files being used, have the files been given meaningful names?		
	Are files up to date?		
	Is a faculty or school template used (is it consistent with other QMplus courses within the same faculty/school)?		
<i>Suggested</i>	Are meaningful subheadings topics/sections used (example readings, lectures, resources, learning outcomes etc.)?		
<i>Suggested</i>	Are QMplus pages or books used to display large amounts of text, or video clips etc.?		
2 - COMMUNICATION			
Communication process	<i>The QMplus news forum should be used to notify students of important information regarding the course</i>		
	Is it clear how students will receive notifications from staff (for example, is a QMplus news forum being used within the course area)?		
	Baseline+: Is the news forum displayed at the top in topic zero?		
	Is it clear how students should contact staff?		
	Is it clear how students can communicate with other students (for example, is there a general QMplus forum/message board)?		
	If there is a QMplus forum board for students, is this being used appropriately (for example, are students being encouraged to post, and are posts being replied to and monitored)?		
Course Expectations	Is an explanation of how to use the QMplus course conveyed to students (for example, how the course area has been structured, how to use forums, where to submit assignments, sticking to deadlines, online behaviour)? Or has a course handbook with this information been provided?		
ITEM	DETAILS	DNM / Partial Meet / Ex	Notes
3. ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK			
Assessment Information	<i>The Assessment Information tab (which replaces the block) should be used for consistency</i>		
	Has assessment information been included and is it displayed prominently on the page?		
	Does it include?:		
	- Dates for the assessment and any deadlines		
	- Cut off dates		
	- How to submit		
	- Penalty information and extenuating circumstances information		
	- Things that need to be included in assessment submissions or additional guidance for assessment submissions		
4. COURSE REVIEW AND RECORDINGS			
Lecture Recordings	<i>Lectures which take place in a Q-Review enabled room should be recorded (unless opt out applies)</i>		
	Is there a link to Q-Review recordings available in the QMplus course area?		
	Has the Q-Review link been synched with the relevant Q-Review content? i.e. when the Q-Review link is clicked on, does it go to the Q-Review content?		
	Are there any Q-Review recordings available to watch within the course area (if course has already started)?		
	If no to any of the above, is there an explanation given for why recordings are not available or when they will be available?		
Other Resources	Are there lecture slides or other course material available?		
	Are the lecture slides or other course material current/up to date (if dates are applicable)?		
	Are reading lists available?		
	In Talis reading list?		

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Accessibility checklist

1. Text based content (Files/Documents/Pages)			
Digital features	Details	DNM / Partial Meet / Ex	Notes
Text content is flexible	Can the font, font size and colours can be changed by user?		
Colour contrasts and use of colour	Have you made sure that colour contrasts work well (WebAIM color checker)?		
Font style and size	Are the font size minimum 12 on reading documents and you have used font style sans-serif: Arial, Calibri, Helvetica, Comic Sans Not serif fonts: Times, Times New Roman, Courier?		
Filenames/Titles and description	Have you given filenames/titles that are meaningful and provide descriptions along with filesize, particularly when sharing them via VLE?		
Appropriate structure, headers & footers	Do files/pages have appropriate header giving details, headings following hierarchy, and footers with key info (page number, filename, version, author, date) ?		
Hyperlinks	Have you made sure the text-based Hyperlinks - e.g. use Wikipedia (not Wikpedia: Click here or https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page)?		
2. Powerpoint for Presentation			
Digital features	Details	DNM / Partial Meet / Ex	Notes
Font type and size	Have you used large san-serif fonts, i.e. Arial 24 pt?		
Amount of content on a slide	Have you kept minimal amount of text within your slides to either short sentences or bullet points?		
Pictures, charts or diagrams	Have you added ALT text (Guidance on ALT text) with an explanation in words underneath them?		
Tables formatted for accessibility	Are the content, headers and reading order are accessible in your tables? Link to video on using tables.		
3. Course Layout on QMplus			
Digital features	Details	DNM / Partial Meet / Ex	Notes
Course format	Have you used Collapsed topic format or Grid format for your QMplus course areas? (Courses that require scrolling are not easy to navigate when using assistive technologies. Collapsed topic reduces vertical scrolling and allows you to highlight a particular section or current section. The grid format also reduces the vertical scrolling by allowing content to be organised into sections which are accessed by clicking on the buttons).		
Structure, headings and sign-posting	Have you provided informative topic headings within a course? (These will inform students what they are going to learn in a particular section. Ensure that you use labels that contain Moodle headings as this enables visually impaired students to navigate through your course using screen reading software.)		
Resource/Activity names and description	Have you used short concise descriptions for activities and resources? (Adding no description provides no context to students and adding a long description risks excluding dyslexic students and increase the vertical scrolling within your Moodle course.)		
Completion tracking	Have you enabled completion tracking? (This allows students (particularly with learning difficulties) to see what they have previously viewed/completed. This enables them to develop their own learning plan and define their own pace of learning.)		

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Appendix C – hours and costs involved to carry out the audit

- The students audited 414 courses in a total of 284 hours.
- On average it took about 40 minutes to audit one QMplus module.
- The students were paid £12 per hour, at a cost of £16.77 per hour.
- The cost for the audit was covered by the Faculty of HSS.

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Further readings

1. The QMplus Baseline Standards Checklist used for the audit is available here:
<https://elearning.qmul.ac.uk/enhancing-your-teaching/baseline-standards/>
2. E-Learning Unit's 2016/17 student survey - <https://elearning.qmul.ac.uk/students/survey-results/201617-survey/>
3. E-Learning Unit's QMplus Baseline Standards <https://elearning.qmul.ac.uk/about-us/major-themes-2018-19/qmul-e-learning-baseline-standards-introduction/>