

Chapter 12

Quality Enhancement

12. QUALITY ENHANCEMENT

12.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines how the University, in accordance with the UK Quality Code of Higher Education, promotes continuous and systematic enhancement of the student educational experience. It also details how the University uses a range of student feedback and quality enhancement processes to inform and improve the student educational experience strategically for both current and future cohorts.

12.2 A culture of enhancement

There is a culture of enhancement within UWTSD, with all staff across academic and professional units engaged with and responsible for the systematic enhancement of the student experience.

As detailed in this chapter, a variety of formal mechanisms are in place to encourage reflection on performance, to identify areas for enhancement and improvement, and to monitor the impact of any action taken. In addition to such formal mechanisms, enhancement also occurs more informally because of the culture of enhancement embedded within the institution.

12.3 Student engagement with enhancement

Key to enhancement is the University's strong commitment to students as active partners in their educational experience. As a result, the University collaborates closely with its students to create strong and vibrant learning communities where all students are able to fulfil their individual potential.

The University systematically seeks student feedback in key areas to inform its strategic approach to enhancement and to ensure that action taken is informed by student feedback (see also Chapter 5).

Feedback may be formal or informal, may take a variety of forms, and includes:

- participation in national surveys, covering every level of provision, to enable the external benchmarking of performance;
- the use of module questionnaires to assist with reflection;
- the consistent gathering of student feedback responses at meetings or in class settings as a tool for evaluation and to inform action for improvement.

The University wants students to actively engage as partners with the enhancement of their programmes and educational experience more widely, including through the formal mechanisms of the student representation system and staff student committee processes.

Student representation and engagement is therefore embedded at all key quality assurance processes and within the institutional enhancement theme.

12.4 Collaborative Partner institutions

It is recognised that quality enhancement may take a different format for collaborative partner institutions. Processes and committee structures may, for example, be different.

However, all collaborative partner institutions are expected to:

- meet the expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education;
- have in place a culture of enhancement;
- value students as key and active partners to enhance their educational experience;

- have a strategic approach to enhancement;
- systematically embed enhancement within quality assurance processes as outlined in the Academic Quality Handbook;
- systematically embed enhancement within learning and teaching processes, using the principles outlined in section 12.8.

12.5 A strategic approach to enhancement

The key strategy for enhancement is the Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Strategy.

In addition, a range of other strategies focus on enhancement of the student educational experience and student outcomes in specified areas, such as:

- Digital Framework – Blended Learning
- UWTSD Strategic Equality Plan
- Employment and Employability Strategy
- Student Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- Fee and Access Plan
- Research Strategy
- Retention Strategy

The strategic approach to enhancement is characterised by, for example:

- the use of quality assurance and student feedback processes to provide opportunities for systematic reflection, the evidence for areas of weakness and strength, and identification of priorities for quality enhancement;
- the comprehensive analysis of all key students' outcomes data (including the external and internal benchmarking of such data) in order to identify any discipline areas or specific cohorts where performance needs to be enhanced and to identify good practice for dissemination;
- the use of Key Performance Indicators to measure and monitor progress made and provide evidence of impact where action has been taken;
- focused attention to increase or further develop performance in a specified area through an institution-wide enhancement theme (see 12.7);
- the setting of clear institution-wide expectations in a number of key areas (e.g. in relation to assessment and feedback or the Learning and Teaching Standards);
- the embedding of a range of processes and mechanisms to encourage the piloting of new approaches and to identify and disseminate good practice (e.g. through staff development or a central teaching and learning conference);
- regular and consistent reflection on areas of weakness and strength and the monitoring of any action taken as part of the committee structure.

12.6 Key committees

Within the institution, key committees in relation to enhancement are:

- Senate
- Academic Standards Committee (ASC)
- Student Experience Committee (SEC)
- Research Committee
- Institute Boards
- Research Degrees Committee

In collaborative partner institutions, a different committee framework may be in place, which reflects their nature, size, range of disciplines, and student cohorts.

However, there is an expectation that, whatever structures are in place, the committee framework will provide the following:

- oversight of the strategic framework, processes, and actions relating to quality enhancement;
- a consistent focus on the further development of the resources and facilities that support the student educational experience;
- a framework that ensures oversight of the enrichment of the educational experience of all cohorts of students;
- a forum for debate about innovation in learning and teaching and a mechanism for the identification and dissemination of good practice in relation to pedagogy;
- a project management framework for enhancement initiatives and pilots;
- a structure that will allow for reflection and evaluation of student support, wellbeing, and welfare processes and initiatives;
- comprehensive analysis of feedback results as well as any survey and league table results;
- the embedding of systems to allow for the monitoring of any action taken in response to areas for improvement identified.

12.7 Enhancement themes

As part of the University-wide strategic approach to enhancement, every two years Senate approves a new enhancement theme to drive enhancement in a specified area across the institution. This theme applies to all HE provision within the UWTSD Group. For 2020/21, the enhancement theme is 'blended learning'. Collaborative partner institutions can choose to adopt this theme. However, they may prefer to select their own theme depending on their context and their performance needs.

Adopting a University-wide enhancement theme allows for a sustained focus in a specified area in order to enhance performance across the institution. It also enhances opportunities for collaboration: between staff and students, between disciplines, between academic and professional units, and across the UWTSD Group.

Key to the institutional enhancement theme are the proactive engagement of staff and students with one theme for two years, the identification of good practice at discipline level, and the systematic sharing of and rolling out of good and innovative practice to enhance performance across the UWTSD Group.

Specific enhancement themes are the result of the analysis of performance or reflect key sector-wide concerns or drivers, such as the work of HEFCW, TEF, REF, AdvanceHE, Jisc, and the NUS.

Approaches to the enhancement theme may differ. However, flexibility is always built in so that units can engage with the theme in a way that is appropriate to their discipline and / or type of unit. Professional units are encouraged to participate in the institutional enhancement theme as appropriate. Reports are produced to reflect on the various activities, measure the impact of pilots and projects on student outcomes and student experience, and to enable roll out and dissemination.

In addition to the University-wide enhancement theme, as a result of reflection on key performance data and other information (e.g. as a result of annual review, strategic planning or TEF related activities), Institutes may choose to have enhancement priorities at Institute or subject level.

12.8 Enhancement and quality assurance processes

All key quality assurance processes (e.g. curriculum development, programme validation, programme review) embed quality enhancement. The evidence gathered at these stages provides the foundation for a focused and strategic approach to enhancement.

Examples of this include:

- consistent reflection at programme and discipline level of pedagogy, performance, student outcomes and students' overall educational experience (e.g. as part of annual review processes);
- evaluation of sector- or discipline-wide new developments (e.g. in relation to educational technology, developments in pedagogy, or learning space design) to inform or underpin the chosen approach to enhancement;
- the systematic use of external examiners and external readers to benchmark performance, obtain feedback and embed an element of externality to these processes;
- the Annual Quality Report produced by the Students' Union which provides a set of recommendations for the enhancement of the University's performance in a specific area.

12.9 Enhancement of learning and teaching processes

Systematic enhancement of the quality of learning and teaching processes takes place through a number of different mechanisms. Institutes and collaborative partner institutions enhance the learning and teaching within their disciplines, for example, through:

- systematic identification of areas for enhancement through their strategic planning and annual review processes;
- systematic reflection on student achievements and outcomes;
- adherence and compliance with any baseline expectations set for the whole institution (e.g. Learning and Teaching Standards);
- a focused and holistic approach to continued professional development for staff (e.g. through the set Institute or subject level teaching and learning development days);
- the use of a peer observation process, in accordance with the University's Peer Review Policy, to identify areas of innovation as well as areas for enhancement, to encourage the sharing and dissemination of good practice amongst peers, and to systematically enhance teaching and learning across the unit;
- the availability of support and opportunities to staff to further develop their teaching and learning and engage with continued professional staff development (e.g. through the staff development events, professional learning pathways and training, the acquisition of a teaching qualification, or obtaining of an HEA fellowship);
- enhanced support offered to all staff new to teaching and learning (e.g. through mentoring opportunities);
- encouragement of the sharing of good and innovative practice through participation of staff at the annual learning and teaching conference, with external subject and discipline level initiatives, or with professional bodies;
- systematic reflection with staff on their performance in relation to teaching and learning.