University of
BRISTOL

BOARD OF TRUSTEES 22 NOVEMBER 2019

REPORT TITLE	ACADEMIC QUALITY & STANDARDS REPORT TO THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES		
CLASSIFICATION *Please see University Executive Board Report Writing Guidance 3.3.*	**OPEN** ☒ **CONFIDENTIAL** ☐ **STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL** ☐		
Report Authors: Professor Sally Heslop Elinor Davies		**Job Title:** Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education Quality and Standards) Director of Education Quality and Policy	
Sponsored by: Prof Judith Squires		**Job Title:** Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost	
For decision ☒		**For discussion:** ☐	

Actions/Decisions Required

Board of Trustees is asked to:
1. <u>APRROVE</u> the quality assurance report

Executive Summary
This report covers major changes to the educational quality framework in 208/19 (external and internal), outcomes from the operation of the framework in 2018/19 and plans for 2019/20. The BoT is required by the Office for Students to assure itself that the University is compliant with all its conditions of registration; 25% of these conditions are related to educational quality and standards.

Link to Strategic Plan High quality student experience and academic quality and standards	**NO** ☐		**YES** ☒
Link to Risk Register .	**NO** ☒		**YES** ☐
Summary of any consultations carried out	**NO** ☒		**YES** ☐
Summary of any Equality, Diversity & Inclusion implications Differential progression and attainment for BAME and International students	**NO** ☐		**YES** ☒
Summary of any Sustainability Implications	**NO** ☒		**YES** ☐
Report/Supporting Information			
Report/Supporting Information attached.	**NO** ☐		**YES** ☒

UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL

EDUCATIONAL QUALITY ASSURANCE REPORT TO THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Executive summary

This report covers major changes to the educational quality framework in 2018/19 (external and internal), outcomes from the operation of the framework in 2018/19 and plans for 2019/20. The BoT is required by the Office for Students to assure itself that the University is compliant with all its conditions of registration, of which 25% are related to educational quality and standards.

2018/19 outcomes - Key assurance points

1. Taught programmes generally well regarded by external examiners and accrediting bodies with specific areas of concern being addressed.
2. New programme proposals and educational partnerships developed in line with appropriate quality and standards framework.
3. Education provision reviewed by Faculty Quality Teams and quality and standards confirmed.
4. Education metrics including student survey results, progression and completion data show quality and standards are secure; areas of concern are being addressed.

2019/20 plans - Key assurance improvements

1. We will carry out eight Periodic Programme Revalidations in areas of risk or little previous scrutiny.
2. The new University Quality Team will review all education provision consistently across the institution.
3. We will strengthen student engagement and voice in quality assurance policy and processes.
4. We will carry out work on two key areas of concern for the HE sector/OfS, namely degree outcomes and differential progression and achievement.

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1. *Changes to the external environment*

The University of Bristol now operates within a higher education QA framework in England which has changed fundamentally since 2018.

The Office for Students (OfS) came into being on 1st January 2018 as a sector regulator in England (but not the rest of the UK) and has adopted a **risk-based approach** to its assessment and monitoring activities. Its primary aim is to ensure that English higher education is delivering positive outcomes for students – past, present, and future. It seeks to ensure that students from all backgrounds (particularly the most disadvantaged) can access, succeed in, and progress from higher education. Its **four primary regulatory objectives** are to ensure that all students, from all backgrounds, who have the ability and desire to undertake higher education:

1. *Are supported to access, succeed in, and progress from, higher education;*
2. ***Receive a high quality academic experience and have their interests protected while they study or in the event of provider, campus or course closure.***
3. ***Are able to progress into employment or further study and have their qualifications hold their value over time.***
4. *Receive value for money.*

Objectives 2 and 3 are specified by the OfS as the ones which cover educational quality and standards and are the ones covered in this report. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor is responsible for Objective 1 and the Director of Planning for Objective 4.

The regulatory framework is designed to mitigate the risk that these primary objectives are not met. The OfS regulates at **sector** level to create the conditions for competition, continuous improvement and informed choice, and at **provider** level to ensure a baseline of protection for all students and the taxpayer.

The OfS operates a single register for all providers. There are two categories, each with a set of benefits and regulatory requirements that are proportionate to the risks to student and taxpayer interests, and each provider chooses which category it wants to register in. Providers must demonstrate that they satisfy a set of initial conditions of registration and are subject to a risk assessment (focussing on outcomes rather than processes) to determine whether they will be able to continue to satisfy their conditions. The OfS quality and standards conditions for registration are:

Condition B1: The provider must deliver well-designed courses that provide a high quality academic experience for all students and enable a student's achievement to be reliably assessed.

Condition B2: The provider must provide all students, from admission through to completion, with the support that they need to succeed in and benefit from higher education.

Condition B3: The provider must deliver successful outcomes for all of its students, which are recognised and valued by employers and/or enable further study.

Condition B4: The provider must ensure that qualifications awarded to students hold their value at the point of qualification and over time, in line with sector recognised standards.

Condition B5: The provider must deliver courses that meet the academic standards as they are described in the Framework for Higher Education Qualification (FHEQ) at Level 4 or higher.

The final condition (B6) is the requirement to participate in TEF (Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework).

The OfS normally uses its conditions of registration to ensure that providers continue to meet baseline requirements, rather than to drive continuous improvement. An exception to this is access and participation for providers in the Approved (fee cap) category (which includes Bristol), where the baseline requirement is that a provider must have an agreed access and participation plan which will deliver continuous improvement. The OfS will use its risk assessment to decide if any enhanced monitoring is needed as further mitigation of the risks posed by an individual provider.

The OfS appointed the UK's Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) as its designated quality body (DQB) to assess the quality of, and standards applied to, the higher education of providers seeking to register. The QAA carries out Quality and Standards Reviews (QSR), based on the set of expectations and core practices in the revised UK Quality Code for Higher Education (in **Annex 1**).

Once a provider is registered the OfS will not systematically reassess its compliance, other than as a result of random sampling.

The **key quality and standards impacts for Bristol** under the new OfS regime are:

i.   there is **no longer a cyclical external quality and standards review process -** we will be reviewed only if selected for random sampling or if OfS identifies indicators of concern;

ii. our **internal quality framework is aligned to the revised UK Quality Code** for Higher Education (Annex 1) and designed to satisfy the relevant OfS conditions of registration;

iii. we must engage with the **OfS concerns about grade inflation.** Our data on UG degree outcomes indicate we have less of a problem here than many other institutions in the Russell Group and the wider HE sector (our "unexplained" percentage point rise in 1st/2:1s awarded since 2011 is 6% compared to a sector average of 13.3%) but there is work to be done in this area. We have work planned for 2019/20 to meet the requirements outlined in the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assurance statement on degree outcomes;

iv. we must **understand and address differential progression and attainment** by different group of students; for Bristol the focus is BAME students and international students and work is planned on this through 2019/20.

2. *Changes to the internal environment*

The University implemented a number of changes to educational governance (leadership and committees) and to the quality assurance framework in 2019.

Change	Reason	New role holder(s) (if applicable)	Date
Set up new role of Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education Quality and Standards), reporting to the PVC Education.	To provide expert senior academic leadership for assuring the quality and standards of all undergraduate and postgraduate programmes and the quality of the taught student academic experience.	Prof Sally Heslop	July 2019
Appointed 4 University Education Directors (Quality)	To provide the senior academic core of the new University Quality team.	Prof David Dymock Dr Helen Heath Dr Catherine Hindson Dr Kate Whittington	Aug 2019
Appointed permanent Director of Academic Quality and Policy in Education Services	To lead the Quality and Policy team and provide expert professional support for the new University Quality Team and the new University Quality Framework.	Elinor Davies	June 2019
Reconfigured Academic Quality and Standards Cttee (AQSC) to include greater student representation and enhanced scrutiny of curriculum changes. AQSC now chaired by the APVC (Education Quality & Standards)	To delegate additional powers for quality and standards issues from the University Education Committee (which has a very wide remit) to the relevant expert body.		Aug 2019
Set up new role of Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor (PG Research) reorting to the PVC Research, and a new PGR Cttee reporting to Research Cttee.	In response to the review of postgraduate research (PGR) governance.	Prof Robert Bickers	Aug 2019
Set up new roles of Faculty PGR Directors	In response to the review of PGR governance	Various	Aug 2019
Set up new role of Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching) reporting to the PVC Education, and a new L&T Cttee reporting to Education Cttee	To manage the combined responsibilities of UG and taught PG education resulting from the changes to PGR governance.	Dr Mark Allinson	Aug 2019
Reconfigured the roles of the Faculty Education Directors	To manage the combined responsibilities of UG and taught PG education resulting from the changes to PGR governance	Various	Aug 2019
Created the new role of PVC (Student Experience)	To create capacity and leadership for student wellbeing, student inclusion and student voice	Prof Sarah Purdy	March 2019
Appointed a new PVC (Education)	To lead major change in education	Prof Tansy Jessop	July 2019

These changes are designed to increase capacity and leadership to assure quality and standards. The scale and speed of these changes does in our view create some risk related to:

- redeployment of key expertise;
- multiple new people coming into new or revised roles all at the same time;
- change of educational structures at University, faculty and school level;
- significant change in the QA framework.

The risk around the change in the QA framework is owned by the Associate PVC for Education Quality and Standards, managed by the Director of Quality and Policy, mitigated through very careful design of the work plan for the University Academic Quality and Standards Committee (at annex 2), University Quality Team and a structured programme of induction for all members of the new UQT, and monitored constantly to manage any emerging issues.

The risk around the change to educational governance is owned and managed by University Education Committee, which is chaired by the PVC Education.

3. *Summary of the work carried out under the internal quality framework in 2018/19, showing process changes and key outcomes.*

As previously reported to the Board in November 2018, the University's internal quality assurance framework is designed to ensure we meet our external obligations and requirements, assure the quality and standards of our education provision for all students and surface good practice for dissemination across the University and nationally. Please see the diagram at annex 3.

Component	Process changes (if any)	Key outcomes
External Examiners for taught programmes	Clarifying the role of the external examiner and promoting strong relationships between externals and Schools	• For 2017/18, 145 UG external reports were received and 1 raised serious concerns*. For 2018/19 138 UG external reports were received and 1 raised serious concerns*. (* see section 4) • For 2017/18, 133 PGT external reports were received and none recorded serious concerns. PGT reports for 18/19 are due in Dec 2019 • Actions from externals' recommendations captured in Education Action Plans (EAPs) • UAQSC monitored University-level actions
Postgraduate research thesis examinations		• 752 candidates in 18/19 • 10 concerns raised by examiners and dealt with by Schools and Faculties
New and changed programmes	• Strengthened planning around market appraisal and recruitment • Separation of policy from guidance for greater clarity	• All proposals scrutinised in line with revised policy • Conditional approval given where programme complexity needs resolving.
Programme review	Revised policy of Periodic Programme Revalidation with strong link to professional accreditation	• No reviews took place in 18/19 as the focus of work was on the policy development
Professional accreditation	Faster reporting on outcomes and actions required to UAQSC 45% of taught students at UoB are on programmes that are professionally accredited	• Successful reaccreditation of 47 UG and 3 PGT programmes by 9 accrediting bodies • Actions captured in School EAPs • UAQSC monitored University-level actions
Educational partnerships	Separation of policy from guidance for greater clarity	• 21 PGRs registered on co-tutelle arrangements with 4 new overseas partner institutions

		• Negotiation of partnership agreements for 4 new Doctoral Training Centres • UAQSC (via EPEG) monitored register of partnerships
Faculty Quality Teams (FQT)	Replacement of 6 FQTs with 1 new University Quality Team from August 2019	• FQTs undertook review activity as planned with all 28 Schools • Actions captured in School EAPs • Reports and actions reviewed by UAQSC
Student Surveys NSS – final year UG students YBS – all UG except final year and PGT students PRES – PGR students	Participation in PGT NSS as part of OfS pilot – results due in Spring 2020	• NSS 2019 results as reported to the BoT in July showed some improvements from 2018, as did the internal YBS. • PRES 2018 results led to actions on P&PD, Distance Learning, International and PGRs who teach. PRES 2019 results will be reviewed for impact. • Actions captured in School EAPs • Actions for the University monitored by UEC
Education Action Plans	Simplification of template based on feedback from Schools	• Meetings with every School in autumn 2018 to discuss EAP • FQTs used EAPs in reviews • Generally good engagement from Schools
Education issues from student complaints and appeals		• UEC owns education issues raised by student appeals and complaints and in 18/19 addressed extenuating circumstances and resit policy

4. *Extraordinary reporting process for external examiner reports*

One UG External Examiner wrote to the Associate PVC (Educational Quality and Standards) under the extraordinary reporting process, raising serious concerns about over-generous marking and grade inflation in degree classifications in the subject area in 2018/19. This has been investigated by Professor Heslop, who wrote to the External Examiner setting out the results of her investigation, acknowledging some cause for concern and setting out the actions that would be taken. The School has agreed an action plan and sent it to the external examiner, who is content with the planned approach. This will be followed up with planned interventions through TESTA and Periodic Programme Revalidation (PPR) in 2019/20.

There was one report submitted through this process in 2017/18. The issues raised by the external examiner were dealt with and the external's report submitted this year acknowledges this by commenting on the great improvement in practice.

5. *Other outcomes from 2018/19 relevant to OfS regulatory objectives 2 and 3*

5.1 The institutional Access and Participation Plan, which requires enhanced monitoring by the OfS, is owned by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and has been seen by the Board of Trustees.

5.2 Student protection plan – developed in 17/18 and accepted by OfS in support of registration. This is reviewed annually, most recently in March 2019 when no changes were deemed necessary.

5.3 Quality and standards activity contribute to some Education and Student Experience SPIs.

5.4 Our TEF metrics and internal data for UG and PG students show good levels of continuation and completion. The BoT has seen a separate report on TEF. Graduate destinations data show low levels

of unemployment for UG and PG students with high numbers entering employment and progressing to further study. Differential progression and attainment remains a concern.

6. *Other challenges requiring action in 2019/20*

6.1 The challenge of planning and developing high quality interdisciplinary programmes that cut across our established structures remains an issue. We continue to work with colleagues on these programmes, particularly as Temple Quarter drives these developments at pace and scale.

6.2 Undergraduate programmes in Physics have been <u>conditionally</u> re-accredited by the Institute of Physics (IoP). The condition relates to the high numbers of students who fail to progress through the programme. The IoP raised concerns about our policy on self-certification for students and have asked for data and answers to specific questions for assurance that this is not impacting on standards. We are preparing the required responses for the IoP and will take on board these concerns in planned work on extenuating circumstances and self-certification to be undertaken by University Education Committee in 2019/20.

6.3 Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF)
- o the Board received an update on the risks associated with the TEF, and the planned mitigations, at its meeting on 20th September 2019.
- o good practice which was surfaced through the quality framework and positive outcomes (for example from accreditation visits, commendations from external examiners) form part of the narrative for the TEF submissions at subject and provider level. Actions and interventions as a result of the outcomes of the quality framework processes support our ambitions to improve the metrics.
- o The curriculum enhancement project has been set up to address key weaknesses in assessment and feedback; the project team are working closely with the QA team to ensure the quality framework supports and enables the ambitions and timescales of the project in 2019/20.

7. *Plans for 2019/20*

A summary of the key work areas for UAQSC is in **Annex 2**. In addition to the business-as-usual activities of the internal quality framework, the following will be undertaken this year:

Component	Planned activity	Condition of registration
Programme review	Eight Periodic Programme Revalidations will be undertaken in areas where there are indicators of risk drawing on TEF metrics, curriculum review activity has been taking place or there has not been scrutiny for some time.	B1, B3, B5
Professional Accreditation	The cycle of PSRB accreditation is such that only Computer Science is due to be visited in 2019/20 by the British Computer Society.	B1, B3
University Quality Team	• The new University Quality Team will draw on good practice from the previous FQT teams but will review in a more consistent manner all the University's teaching provision on an annual basis. • Students are members of the review teams and also a source of information about quality and standards and UQT plans to engage with students in more innovative ways from now on.	B1, B2, B3, B5

Degree outcomes	Planned work to meet external requirements and provide assurance internally on grade inflation.	B4
Differential progression and attainment	Planned work to meet external requirements and provide assurance internally on equity of opportunity for all students.	B3
Evaluation	• UAQSC will evaluate the new and changed quality assurance processes. • UEC will evaluate the operation of the new education governance structure • AQPO are developing initial plans for a review of quality and standards in 20/21 drawing on external expertise and linking to our internal audit function.	All conditions
Management of education risks	Planned work to develop an Education Risk Register.	All conditions

Annex 1

The UK Quality Code

Expectations for standards		Expectations for quality	
The academic standards of courses meet the requirements of the relevant national qualifications framework. The value of qualifications awarded to students at the point of qualification and over time is in line with sector-recognised standards.		Courses are well-designed, provide a high-quality academic experience for all students and enable a student's achievement to be reliably assessed. From admission through to completion, all students are provided with the support that they need to succeed in and benefit from higher education.	
Core practices	**Common practices**	**Core practices**	**Common practices**
The provider ensures that the threshold standards for its qualifications are consistent with the relevant national qualifications frameworks. The provider ensures that students who are awarded qualifications have the opportunity to achieve standards beyond the threshold level that are reasonably comparable with those achieved in other UK providers. Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the standards of its awards are credible and secure irrespective of where or how courses are delivered or who delivers them. The provider uses external expertise, assessment and classification processes that are reliable, fair and transparent.	The provider reviews its core practices for standards regularly and uses the outcomes to drive improvement and enhancement.	The provider has a reliable, fair and inclusive admissions system. The provider designs and/or delivers high-quality courses. The provider has sufficient appropriately qualified and skilled staff to deliver a high-quality academic experience. The provider has sufficient and appropriate facilities, learning resources and student support services to deliver a high-quality academic experience. The provider actively engages students, individually and collectively, in the quality of their educational experience. The provider has fair and transparent procedures for handling complaints and appeals which are accessible to all students. Where the provider offers research degrees, it delivers these in appropriate and supportive research environments. Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the academic experience is high-quality irrespective of where or how courses are delivered and who delivers them. The provider supports all students to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes.	The provider reviews its core practices for quality regularly and uses the outcomes to drive improvement and enhancement. The provider's approach to managing quality takes account of external expertise. The provider engages students individually and collectively in the development, assurance and enhancement of the quality of their educational experience.

University Academic Quality and Standards Committee work areas for 2019/20

External requirements
1. Annual Quality Report
2. UK Quality Code monitoring

Oversight of the Quality Framework
3. University Quality Team (UQT)
4. Faculty Quality Teams (FQTs)
5. Student Quality Reviewers (SQRs)
6. Education Action Plans (EAPs)
7. External examining for taught programmes
8. Degree classification statement and taught degree outcomes
9. Annual report of the Research Degrees Examination Board (RDEB)
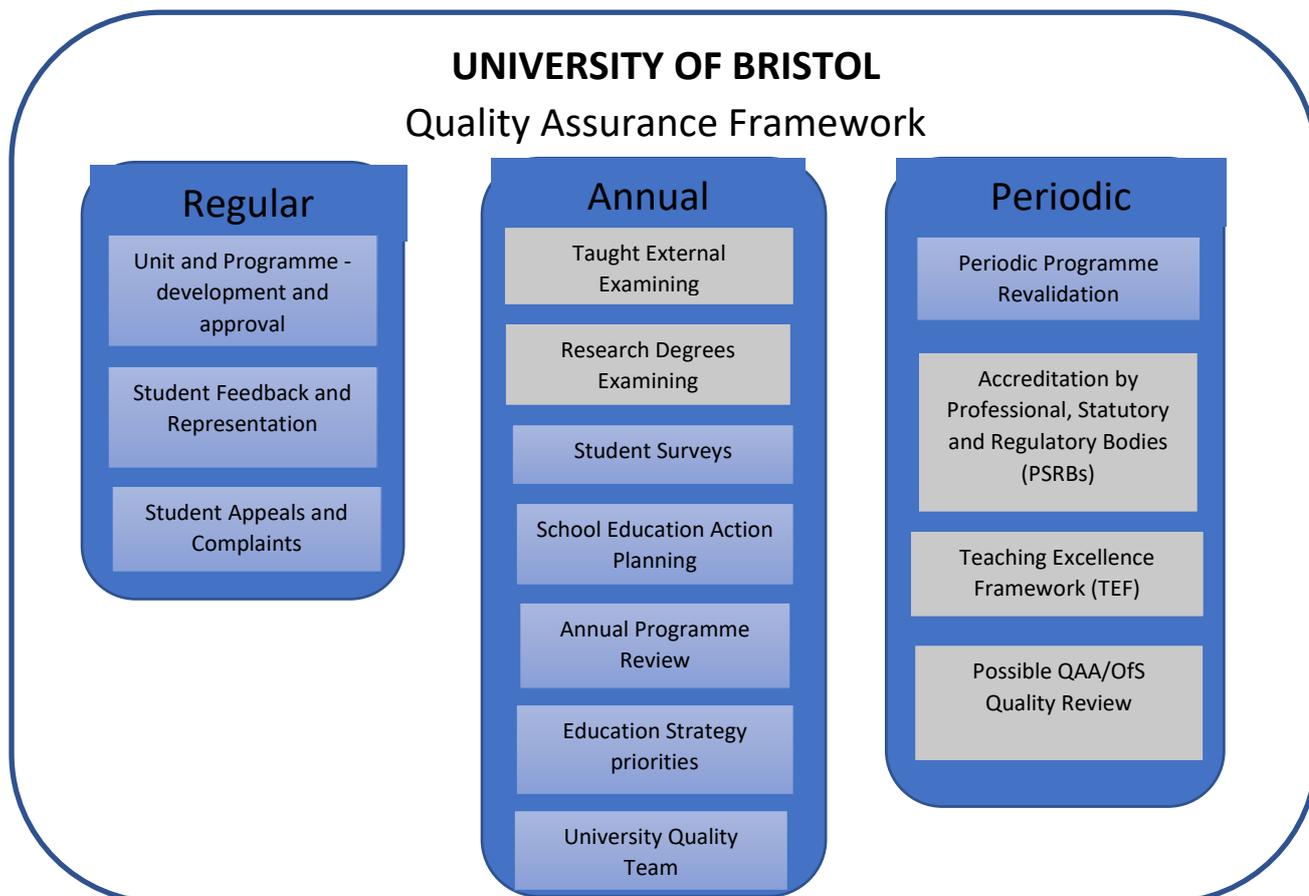10. Quality of examinations

Approval and re-validation of programmes
11. Programme approval
12. Monitoring of designated new programmes
13. Periodic Programme Revalidation (PPR)
14. Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) accreditation of programmes
15. Annual Programme Review for teaching-out programmes
16. Educational partnerships oversight

Regulatory framework
17. Revisions to the Taught and Postgraduate Research Codes of Practice

Annex 3

UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL
Quality Assurance Framework

Regular
- Unit and Programme - development and approval
- Student Feedback and Representation
- Student Appeals and Complaints

Annual
- Taught External Examining
- Research Degrees Examining
- Student Surveys
- School Education Action Planning
- Annual Programme Review
- Education Strategy priorities
- University Quality Team

Periodic
- Periodic Programme Revalidation
- Accreditation by Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs)
- Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF)
- Possible QAA/OfS Quality Review

Key:
Internal quality mechanism   **External quality mechanism**