UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

Strategy for Quality Assurance and Enhancement

1.   **Quality Assurance and Enhancement Policy**

   1.1   *Scope of the policy*

   This policy statement summarises the University's approach to the maintenance of academic standards and to the assurance and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities offered to students. It provides an overview and points to the policies and procedures which provide a framework within which departments and Schools operate.

   1.2   *Guiding principles and elements*

   - We seek too establish policies which identify the minimum institution-wide requirements with which all departments and Schools are expected to comply but which can be augmented at the local level to provide greater specificity in order to accommodate different disciplinary requirements. These policies are intended to provide a framework to ensure consistency of standards, consistency and equivalence in the student experience and to assure a high quality education whilst enabling appropriate diversity in local practices.

   - University policies and procedures for developing and maintaining academic standards and for assessing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities are determined through its deliberative structures. University departments are responsible for their implementation. Schools of Studies are expected to monitor and ensure that their constituent departments do so effectively. Schools report on the outcomes of this activity to University-level committees in order to inform consideration of University-wide issues or provision, to identify areas of good and effective practice which might be disseminated to other areas of the University and to identify areas of potential weakness where there may be scope for improvement. It also allows the University to identify generic trends or themes which may require attention and/or wider dissemination.

   - The key quality assurance and enhancement procedures benefit from the participation of external peer reviewers. Policies and procedures take account of appropriate external reference points and national and international good practice.

   - There is a management framework for the development and support of quality assurance and enhancement, for fostering a climate of review and reflection, and for leading and setting targets for enhancement.

   1.3   *The relationship between teaching and research in the institution*

   The University of Sussex is a research-intensive University. We aspire to ensure that our teaching is informed by cutting-edge research and that it takes place in a research-enriched environment. This involves ensuring that assessment and the learning development of students enables them to understand the nature of research, the opportunity to engage with cutting-

edge research, to carry out independent research projects (especially at taught postgraduate level) and to feel part of a research community.

1.4   *The organisation of the quality assurance and enhancement system*

1.4.1   *Academic standards*

Academic standards for programmes are established and maintained through the *'Academic Framework and the Examinations and Assessment Regulations* (for programmes offered at the University). The former details the design, structure, volume and level of credits for programmes leading to University awards whether delivered by the University itself or a partner institution. The latter specifies these requirements in the case of programmes delivered by the University, together with the progression and award framework applicable to these programmes.

1.4.2   *Approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes*

The University has a formal mechanism for the approval of new academic programmes and changes to the existing curriculum which is set out in the *Curriculum Development and Approval Handbook.* This includes key issues to be taken into account in programme design and guidance on approval criteria.

The formal procedures for the annual monitoring of programmes are set out in the *Annual Monitoring Handbook* which is updated annually and distributed to heads of departments and all of those involved in the annual monitoring process. Outcomes of Annual Monitoring are considered at the Annual Enhancement Event held in December.

The University's requirements for the periodic review of its programmes, which run on a quinquennial cycle, are set out in the *School Periodic Review.* This procedural document sets out the aims and criteria for the review, specifies issues to be addressed in a self-evaluation document by the School under review, and indicates the documentary requirements of the review panel. The School Review process comprises a developmental and strategically focussed model of review (rather than an historically driven audit model). One of its principal aims is also to ensure the continuing validity and relevance of the programmes on offer and to confirm their academic standards with reference to appropriate external reference points.

From 2012-13 student representatives are included in all review panels and participate in the Annual Enhancement Event.

1.4.3   *Assessment of students*

The University has established a single University-wide policy and procedure to secure the standards of its awards and to ensure the fair, equitable and valid assessment of its students. The University has published *Principles of Assessment* which inform programme design. There is a single classification system in operation across the University for all undergraduate degree programmes delivered by the University. Full and comprehensive details of the University's

progression and classification rules and for the University-wide arrangements and rules for internal examination of taught programmes are set out in the *Examination and Assessment Handbook.* These documents are updated annually and are distributed to all internal and external examiners. Complementary handbooks are published for students and the website is used as a principal medium for dissemination of this information. Discipline-based assessment criteria must be published to students by departments and where these form derogations from the University policy must be approved as derogations by the University Teaching and Learning Committee and recorded in the University Examination and Assessment Regulations.

The requirement for the examination and assessment of doctoral students are set out in the regulations for Master of Philosophy, Doctor of Philosophy for Professional Doctorates and Professional Masters degrees respectively. These are included in the Handbook for Doctoral Researchers and the Code of Practice for Research Degrees Programmes both of which are updated annually and published to students and supervisors.

1.4.4   *Arrangements for, and management of, doctoral degrees*

The arrangements for all processes governing the selection of students and supervisors, supervision requirements and arrangements for annual progress and review are set out in the *University of Sussex Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes* which is updated annually and published on the Doctoral School website.

1.4.5   *Quality assurance of teaching staff*

The University is committed to attracting and appointing scholars who are capable of excellence in teaching and research and who support the core University values of teaching and learning.

It is a mandatory requirement for new members of academic staff (on full or proportional contracts) with less than three years full-time teaching experience to undertake and complete a two-year, part-time, Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education.

Academic staff new to research degree supervision are expected to undertake an intensive introductory training for new supervisors. A series of academic-led seminars on aspects of supervision and examination are also provided for existing supervisors. The University's expectations on the professional development and training of supervisors is agreed in a policy statement which is monitored by the Doctoral School Committee.

As a research-intensive University, Sussex makes strategic use of its cadre of research degree students as associate tutors and is committed to providing them with opportunities for skills and career development. We also believe that, in an appropriately managed context, associate tutors make a significant contribution to students learning and to the student experience overall. The University has a long-standing *Policy on Associate Tutors* designed to assure the

quality of their teaching and to maintain standards and it includes guidance on *Good Practice in the Strategic Deployment of Associate Tutors.* Associate tutors with less then three years experience of full-time teaching are required to attend the Sussex Associate Tutors Training Programme (SATTP).

Appraisal is conducted annually. The University's scheme incorporates the requirement for each School to have in place an appraisal policy which identifies local level arrangements for appraisers, time-tables for appraisal training and conduct of appraisal meetings. The key outcome of the appraisal scheme involves the production of a personal action plan; staff are expected to reflect before the appraisal meeting on measures of the effectiveness of their work in relation to generic objectives incorporated in personal action plans which include teaching, learning and assessment.

1.4.6   *Learning resources*

The strategic planning and management of the University Library provision and quality of social and teaching space rests with the PVC Teaching and Learning. The Registrar and Secretary has management responsibility for IT Services. The Information Services Committee has a role in determining University priorities for strategic investment in information services provision. The budgets for the Library and IT Services are set through the submission of operational plans as part of the University's annual planning process. The Director of IT Services and the Librarian are both members of the Teaching and Learning Committee in order to provide input to, and be apprised of, strategic decisions relating to resources designed to support teaching and learning. Each of these services submit annual reports to the Teaching and Learning Committee.

The adequacy of learning resources is consider by the New Academic Courses Committee as the first stage of the course approval process.

Library resources for learning and teaching are prioritised, acquired and managed on the basis of notification of new demands which arise through the course approval process. There is an ongoing dialogue with Schools and departments in order to manage demand for the existing curriculum where course reading lists are submitted by teaching staff and there is a termly management cycle for the receipt, checking and processing of these reading lists.

IT Services resources to support learning and teaching are monitored and updated throughout the year, with major changes such as the upgrade of computers and changes to computer software taking place over the summer. Each academic year, IT Services conducts a review of the applications software which includes new software identified from the course programme approval process. The list of proposed application software for the following year is agreed and published and provision is updated as a result of the review.

A range of mechanisms and procedures are used to evaluate the effectiveness of the Library and the IT Services (which include consultative/user groups and usage statistics).

1.4.7   *Student support*

Each School has a Director of Student Experience responsible for the strategic development of student support systems in the School. In terms of personal support and guidance, academic advisors are available within Schools whose principal role is to provide individual advice to students' on academic matters. Student advisors are located in the Student Life Centre and are responsible for advising student on pastoral matters and the navigation of university policy and procedures.

Peer mentoring schemes within each School including the supervision, training and support of student mentors. Student Mentors are formally linked to the Study Skills Team in the Centre for Employability and Careers.

There is a comprehensive range of institutional services which integrates with supports systems at School-level. The full range of student services is managed by the Student Services http://www.sussex.ac.uk/aboutus/professionalservices/studentservices

Academic support, advice and guidance generally takes three forms. Firstly, induction and re-induction is a key mechanisms for providing advice and guidance to students on what is expected of them throughout the forthcoming year, or stage of their programme. Secondly, students are provided with advice and guidance at strategic points in each academic year when they need to choose course electives and options. This may take the form of briefing documents, elective and option fairs or other fora where advice and guidance is available to assist students in making an appropriate choice. Thirdly, each student is guaranteed access to at least two individual meetings per year with their academic advisor. The role and responsibilities of academic advisors are set out in the *Student Handbook* which is updated annually and which provides comprehensive information for students on their responsibilities as students, the full range of services and support available, key University regulations and policy documents, progress and assessment matters and details of complaints and appeals procedures. http://www.sussex.ac.uk/students/essentials/studenthandbook/

Schools also produce Handbooks which detail local arrangements, facilities and support for students including more detailed advice of academic advising arrangements (and for instance on the roles of year tutor or senior tutors where these schemes apply).

1.4.8   *Course information*

Course-level data is provided to departments for the annual monitoring of undergraduate programmes in the form "spider diagrams". As part of the School Periodic Review process, standard versions of reports provide comprehensive data on admissions, progression, retention and outcomes at programme level together with DLHE data enabling a periodic review of performance trends for the department (or subject area) under review.

In order to support the marks assurance phase of Module Examination Boards, all Boards are routinely provided with course-level data on assessment outcomes. Various key indicators are provided, at both summary level (showing how marks for each module compare to other modules at the same level in terms of marks range, mean and standard deviation), and also in detail for each module (e.g. detailed distributions and recent historical comparisons). A "T test" score is also provided which measures the degree of variance between the marks for students on a given course and the mean mark that the same group of students obtained on other courses at the same level. Examination boards are expected to use these data to assure standards of marking (in relation to agreed criteria) and to seek to identify any aberrant sets of marks for remedial action.

1.4.9 *Public information*

The University publishes information for prospective students via the University prospectus. Programme specifications (held in the Course Management System (CMS) and also published via departmental pages on the website) detail the course learning outcomes, structure of the curriculum and the teaching and assessment methods employed for all programmes that are offered to current cohorts of undergraduate and taught postgraduate students. Supplementary information on programmes is produced in more user-friendly form in School and departmental handbooks.

External examiners' reports are shared with student representatives through the medium of School Teaching and Learning Committees, annual monitoring and the Annual Enhancement Event.

School Periodic Review documentation and outcomes are available on the School Periodic Review web site.

1.5 *The responsibilities of departments, Schools, professional services and individuals in the assurance and enhancement of quality*

1.5.1 A structure of officerships is in place at University, School and departmental levels to provide leadership and support for the development and implementation of quality assurance and enhancement policies and procedures.

The PVC Teaching and Learning's portfolio comprises academic leadership for all matters related to teaching and learning, including collaborative partnerships, quality assurance and enhancement and the overall student experience in relation to all taught programmes. The PVC Research has responsibility for academic leadership relating to the academic standards of research degrees.

Heads of Schools of Studies are responsible for providing leadership, strategic vision and for the financial and academic management of their Schools. Each Head of School is supported by three Directors, each with a significant role in the quality assurance and enhancement of students' learning opportunities. Each School has a Director of

Teaching and Learning and a Director of Doctoral Studies responsible for the strategic development, management, quality assurance and enhancement of the taught curriculum and of research degree programmes respectively. In addition, there is a Director of Student Experience who is responsible student support mechanisms within the School and who works closely with the Student Life Centre student advisors and with the Director of Student Services.

1.5.2 In terms of deliberative structures, oversight of the teaching and learning infrastructure is spear-headed by the **Teaching and Learning Committee**. This body has oversight of the University's academic portfolio under delegated authority of Senate and with explicit responsibility for the establishment and maintenance of academic standards and for the assurance, development and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities. The University sees this as the main driver for change and improvement. The Teaching and Learning Committee has corporate responsibility for the development of strategies, policies and procedures which will define academic standards and promote excellence in learning opportunities and for directing quality assurance and enhancement procedures to ensure that these are maintained, reviewed and enhanced. Detailed policy development, and certain aspects of monitoring, are the responsibility of sub-committees of the Teaching and Learning Committee.

At **School-level** the committees are principally responsible for ensuring implementation of policies and procedures by their constituent departments and evaluating the outcomes of these processes at local level. They identify good practice for dissemination within the School and for report to University-level committees. They also have an important function in recommending changes to, and development of, University policies and procedures in the light of their experience of operating them.

For taught programmes **Module Examination Boards (MABs)** and **Progress and Award Boards (PABs)** have two principal operational functions: MABs are responsible for marks assurance; PABS are responsible recommending progression and award.

The terms of reference and composition of all committees in the University are set out in the *Organisation of the University* document which is updated annually.

1.5.3 The Academic Registry provides professional support for the development of academic policy and the servicing of sub-committees of the Teaching and Learning Committee. The Governance Office services all University-level committees. Staff within the Academic Office are responsible for co-ordinating internal quality assurance arrangements for programme approval, monitoring and review and for external review arrangements and for maintain policy and procedures governing examination and assessment.

The Teaching and Learning Development Unit provides support for staff in the development and design of new programmes, for leading

staff development in new pedagogical approaches, for the delivery of the Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (and the SATTP programme), and for the professional development and training of research degree supervisors. The Unit provides targeted support for initiatives identified by the University.

The Partnership Office oversees the arrangements for collaborative provision in which the University is engaged and services the Collaborative Provision Committee.

The Student Progress and Assessment Office oversees the integrity of examination marks recording systems and processes and administers all unseen and special-needs examinations. It provides briefing to examination board officers and administrative staff involved in the assessment processes.

The Career Development and Employment Centre is leading on the development of the Personal Development Planning initiative within the University and is responsible for developing the University's employability strategy and study skills.

1.6   *The involvement of students in quality assurance*

1.6.1   All second year undergraduate students on degree programmes will be asked to complete this survey of their learning experience on their programme as a whole (as opposed to individual courses) and of their opinion on non-academic services. This supplements and provides a framework to course evaluation questionnaires where the policy, at a minimum, is to seek student opinion on a new course for three successive years and then every third year thereafter. Sussex also participates in the International Student Barometer. Findings from these evaluations and surveys are considered part of annual monitoring processes and overview reports are presented to University-level committees.

1.6.2   The University operates a Student Representative Scheme in partnership with the University of Sussex Student Union. The formal election of representatives is managed by the Students' Union with support from the University. One undergraduate representative and one postgraduate representative, drawn from the pool of departmental representatives, sit on the School Teaching and Learning Committee. USSU sabbatical officers serve on University-level committees; thus the Education Officer serves on the Teaching and Learning Committee and the Student Experience Forum.

Wherever appropriate, students are involved in working groups established by central committees.

The University has a system of School Student Experience Groups to enable dialogue between its student representatives and staff involved in the management of the School.

1.7   *The ways in which policy is implemented, monitored and revised*

The deliberative structures provide a management framework within which implementation of policies is monitored and in which the policies themselves are regularly reviewed. Policy review and change may either be led by central University initiatives or frequently, through changes proposed by Schools resulting from their engagement in the processes and in the light of good practice which they demonstrate.

2.   **Strategic approach to quality**

The University is committed to the continuous enhancement of quality. Rather than establishing a separate quality and enhancement strategy, the University has developed an overarching Teaching and Learning Strategy (which incorporates all our aspirations and targets for the development of the academic portfolio and improvement of the student experience for the foreseeable future). The Teaching and Learning Strategy has been developed as a result of a wide consultative process and will be revised on an annual basis in order to align with the University's Mission and Corporate Strategy and as new institutional priorities are determined. The University's Teaching and Learning Strategy is seen as the main driver for change and for systematic enhancement.

Maintained by Academic Office

Updated November 2012

(Note: This strategy will be revised at the end of the academic year 2013 to ensure its alignment with the new Teaching and Learning Strategy 2013-18 currently in development.