**Chapter A1: UK and European Reference Points for Academic Standards**

Reference points are collectively agreed requirements or points of comparison (at international, national and degree-awarding body level) which are used by degree-awarding bodies to ensure consistency in academic standards.

**Expectation A1**

The Quality Code sets out the following expectation about the use of UK and European reference points for academic standards, which degree-awarding bodies are required to meet.

In order to secure threshold academic standards, degree-awarding bodies:

- **a)** ensure that the requirements of *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland/The framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland* are met by:
  - positioning their qualifications at the appropriate level of the relevant framework for higher education qualifications
  - ensuring that programme learning outcomes align with the relevant qualification descriptor in the relevant framework for higher education qualifications
  - naming qualifications in accordance with the titling conventions specified in the frameworks for higher education qualifications
  - awarding qualifications to mark the achievement of positively defined programme learning outcomes

- **b)** consider and take account of QAA’s guidance on qualification characteristics

- **c)** where they award UK credit, assign credit values and design programmes that align with the specifications of the relevant national credit framework

- **d)** consider and take account of relevant subject benchmark statements.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXTRACT FROM CODE</th>
<th>COMMENTARY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>a)</strong> The FHEQ was first published in 2001 and a second edition was published in 2008. The University reviewed its own Qualifications and Credit Framework on each occasion to ensure continuing alignment. Adjustments made in 2001 included the use of common national descriptors for each level, the requirement for all postgraduate qualifications to be postgraduate in level (removal of Level M1), introduction of the CertHE award, revision to postgraduate pass mark to 50%, requirement for statement of objectives [now learning outcomes] in exit awards. (TLC 01.108, and 01.182-194) In 2008 the University revised its level designations to align to EWNI credit levels (see below).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>b)</strong> The University's validation processes makes use of the qualification descriptors and courses are expected to meet the expectations of the relevant descriptor.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>c)</strong> The University formally adopted the NICATS level descriptors in 2002. These formed the basis for the guidance on academic credit arrangements in higher education in England (QAA, 2008). The University’s Qualifications and Credit Framework was aligned to the credit framework in 2008. (TLC 08.188)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>d)</strong> The subject benchmark statements have been used as reference points in validation since their introduction. Faculties are alerted to any updates.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
National Qualifications Frameworks for Higher Education

National Qualifications Frameworks

National qualifications frameworks are formal structures which are adopted by countries to define their qualification systems. Generally they identify qualification levels in ascending order and state the generic requirements for qualifications to be awarded at each of these levels. The frameworks show what qualifications are at the same level and how it is possible to progress from one qualification to another. They describe a continuum of learning which allows any new qualifications to be placed within the educational system. They are a tool both for securing threshold academic standards nationally and for making valid comparisons of qualifications internationally (thus facilitating student mobility).

An Outcomes-Based Approach to Qualifications and Awards

The fundamental premise of qualifications frameworks in Europe is that qualifications should be awarded on the basis of achievement of positively defined learning outcomes (demonstrated through assessment against a standard) rather than duration of study. Learning outcomes are a statement of what a learner is expected to know, understand and be able to demonstrate after completion of a process of learning.

UK Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications

There are two parallel UK national frameworks for higher education: The framework for higher education qualifications in England Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ), and The framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland (FQHEIS), which apply to the respective UK jurisdictions. The frameworks define, and apply to, all higher education qualifications awarded by degree-awarding bodies. These are the foremost national reference points for threshold academic standards in UK higher education, and all degree-awarding bodies are expected to comply with their specifications. The frameworks for higher education qualifications are supported and contextualised by subject benchmark statements. These national frameworks are maintained by QAA which is also responsible for quality assuring their use. Current versions¹ of the UK frameworks for higher education qualifications are available at:

www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/The-framework-for-higher-education-qualifications-in-England-Wales-and-Northern-Ireland.aspx

QAA (2001) The framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland
www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/FHEQ-Scotland.aspx

¹ The UK national frameworks of higher education qualifications were first published in 2001. The FHEQ was revised in 2008.
### Framework Levels and Qualification Descriptors

The Scottish framework has six levels of higher education qualifications and the framework for the rest of the UK has five (the difference reflects the features of the different education systems operating in the UK, but the frameworks share core purposes and features). Each level represents a distinct level of intellectual achievement and is illustrated by a qualification descriptor for that level. These qualification descriptors are integral to an outcomes-based approach to the award of qualifications as they set out the generic outcomes, characteristics and attributes which holders of qualifications at that level possess in terms of what they know, understand and are able to do. In order for a qualification to be awarded, students are expected to have demonstrated achievement of the relevant outcomes. Both frameworks for higher education qualifications also require a consistent approach to the use of qualification titles (conveying information about the level, nature and subject of study) in order to promote clarity and a common understanding of what UK higher education qualifications signify.

The UK national frameworks for higher education qualifications assist higher education providers, their external examiners and QAA reviewers by providing a point of reference for setting academic standards and assessing student achievement.

Degree-awarding bodies position their qualifications at the appropriate level of the relevant framework for higher education qualifications, ensure that programme outcomes are aligned with the relevant qualification descriptor, and that the frameworks’ requirements in respect of awarding and naming qualifications are met.

### UK Higher Education Qualifications Frameworks and Institutional Reviews

Qualifications frameworks have credibility when the bodies awarding the qualifications undergo regular quality assurance. QAA conducts reviews of all UK degree-awarding bodies and publishes the findings in its reports. All reviews include an assessment of how degree-awarding bodies use the FHEQ or FQHEIS as a reference point in discharging their degree awarding powers. Degree-awarding bodies have to demonstrate how they align the intended learning outcomes of their awards with the relevant levels as denoted by the qualification descriptor in the FHEQ or FQHEIS (as applicable). QAA reviews consider how degree-awarding bodies demonstrate that approval and review processes ensure that the structure of the programme or module (the volume, nature, and assessment of learning) is adequate to achieve the outcomes indicated by the qualification descriptors and other requirements of the frameworks (see Chapter B1: Programme design, development and approval, Chapter B3: Learning and teaching, Chapter B6: Assessment of students and recognition of prior learning, Chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review and Chapter B11: Research degrees of the Quality Code).

QAA reviews also consider how the UK frameworks are used by degree-awarding bodies to assure themselves that the achievement of students is of an academic standard which meets or exceeds the threshold standards set out in the relevant qualifications framework (see Chapter B6: Assessment of students and the recognition of prior learning and Chapter B11: Research degrees of the Quality Code).

In these ways, QAA quality assures the use of the higher education frameworks in order that stakeholders both nationally and internationally may have confidence in higher education qualifications awarded by UK degree-awarding bodies.

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2 [www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review)
### Other UK National Qualifications Frameworks

Within the UK there are also frameworks for general education and Vocational Education and Training (VET) qualifications. In Scotland and in Wales these are integrated into single overarching credit and qualifications frameworks which cover all educational sectors and in which the FQHEIS and the FHEQ respectively are embedded. These are the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) and the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW). See also the section on national credit frameworks, page 16. England and Northern Ireland currently have separate qualifications frameworks for vocational qualifications and general education qualifications in the form of the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF), which is regulated by Ofqual, and the National Qualifications Framework for England and Northern Ireland (NQF). Both the NQF and the QCF support qualifications at lower levels (entry level, level 1 and level 2) up to level 8 and include provision for vocational qualifications at higher levels (4 to 8) which compare with the corresponding levels of the FHEQ. Examples of qualifications on the QCF are Higher National Certificates and Higher National Diplomas awarded by Edexcel.\(^3\) There are opportunities for progression between frameworks. In order to demonstrate the links between these various frameworks and how qualifications in the different jurisdictions of the UK, and its close neighbour the Republic of Ireland, compare with each other, the authorities responsible for the frameworks have produced a guide to the qualifications frameworks (and the qualifications offered) in each of the countries: *Qualifications can cross boundaries - a rough guide to comparing qualifications in the UK and Ireland.* This guide is maintained by QAA.

### European Qualifications Frameworks

Both the FHEQ and the FQHEIS are aligned with the *Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area* (the QF-EHEA) and their compatibility with it has been formally verified. The UK is part of the intergovernmental initiative, commonly referred to as the Bologna Process. The aims of the Bologna Process are to create a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and to make Europe's higher education systems more transparent, thus facilitating international recognition of qualifications and creating opportunities for increased student and graduate mobility.

The QF-EHEA provides a mechanism for relating the national qualifications frameworks of different countries to each other. All 47 countries participating in the Bologna Process are required\(^4\) to establish national frameworks for higher education qualifications which are quality assured by a competent body, and to verify the compatibility of their frameworks with the QF-EHEA.

Summaries of the conclusions and implications of the verification processes for the UK (undertaken by QAA for Scotland in 2006 and for England, Wales and Northern Ireland in 2008) are published in:


QAA: Bologna self-certification: Scotland www.qaa.ac.uk/AssuringStandardsAndQuality/Qualifications/Pages/Bologna-Self- Certification-Scotland.aspx

A European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF) has also been agreed by the European Commission (covering all education and training awards in Europe). The FHEQ and FQHEIS are compatible with this framework.

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\(^3\) HNCs and HNDs which appear on the FHEQ are only those which are awarded by degree-awarding bodies under licence from Edexcel.

\(^4\) This requirement was set for countries participating in the Bologna Process in the 2003 Bergen ministerial communiqué.
### Guidance on Qualification Characteristics

QAA publishes guidance on the characteristics of certain qualifications:

QAA (2011) *Doctoral degree characteristics*  
www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Doctoral_characteristics.aspx

QAA (2010) *Master's degree characteristics*  
www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Masters-degree-characteristics.aspx

QAA (2010) *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark*  
www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Foundation-Degree-qualification-benchmark-May-2010.aspx

*Doctoral degree characteristics* and *Master's degree characteristics* provide information about the purposes, content, assessment methods and titles of different types of UK doctoral and master's degrees. They are additional reference points to provide advice and guidance for those responsible for doctoral and master's programmes. Degree-awarding bodies consider and take account of these characteristics.

The *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark* identifies the distinctive features of the Foundation Degree (at level 5 of the FHEQ) that are not necessarily present in other qualifications at that level. It describes the qualification in terms of its particular purpose, general characteristics and generic outcomes, but it does not include subject-level detail. Degree-awarding bodies consider and take account of the specifications of this benchmark.

### National Credit Frameworks for Higher Education

**Credit and Credit Frameworks**

Academic credit is a means of quantifying and recognising learning. Individual modules and programmes may be assigned a credit value which indicates both the amount of learning expected (the number of credits) and its depth, complexity and intellectual demand (the credit level). Thus credit can be used as a proxy measure of learning outcomes and allows the volume and level of outcomes to be described for qualifications. Credit frameworks typically define credit volumes and levels associated with particular qualifications, both in terms of the minimum numbers of credits comprising the programme and the minimum number of credits pitched at the level of the qualification (the exit level). Credit frameworks are therefore threshold reference points for those designing and approving academic programmes where credit is awarded, and bring consistency of approach to the use of credit.

**UK Credit Frameworks**

Both Scotland and Wales have overarching, integrated credit and qualifications frameworks which span all levels of education and vocational training, including higher education:

- Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework  
  www.scqf.org.uk

- Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales  
  www.cqfw.net
As a result of national agreements, all degree-awarding bodies in Scotland and in Wales use credit as a basis for their higher education qualifications.

Most, but not all, degree-awarding bodies in England and Northern Ireland use credit-based systems in the design and management of their taught curricula and have done so for many years.

Credit is not, however, universally used for programmes in some vocational subjects, such as medicine and veterinary science. The majority of research degrees are not credit-based.

The Higher education credit framework for England: guidance on academic credit arrangements in higher education in England provides guidance on the use of credit in the design of programmes leading to the main higher education qualifications awarded in England and Northern Ireland and complements the FHEQ. It is used by degree-awarding bodies which award UK credit for higher education programmes in England and Northern Ireland. The current version of the framework is available at:


While the discussion of credit differs in the frameworks used in the different jurisdictions of the UK, its application is underpinned by principles which are common to them all. Within the UK, one credit represents ten notional hours of learning (an estimate of how long it will take a typical student, on average, to achieve the learning outcomes including not only formal contact hours but time spent in preparation for classes, private or independent reading and study, revision and the completion of assessment). Degree-awarding bodies use this guide as a basis for setting the credit value of a module or programme before it is offered to students. Credit is awarded when the specific set of learning outcomes for a module or programme have been successfully achieved as demonstrated through completion of assessment to a threshold standard.

Within the context of the minimum credit values set out in the credit frameworks, UK degree-awarding bodies structure programmes in whatever ways are appropriate to the achievement of the aims of the qualifications, their strategic approaches to teaching and learning, and the characteristics of the associated student groups. Credit frameworks potentially facilitate the transfer of credit between programmes and between providers but this process is not automatic. Individual degree-awarding bodies are solely responsible for determining what credit they will accept for the purpose of credit transfer or accumulation towards their individual awards.

Credit recognition implies eligibility to be considered for, but not entitlement to, admission with advanced standing and exemption from part of a programme.

See also Chapter B2: Recruitment, selection and admission to higher education and Chapter B6: Assessment of students and the recognition of prior learning for more detailed information on the transfer of credit between degree-awarding bodies and the recognition of prior learning.

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5 The Higher education credit framework for England: Guidance on academic credit arrangements in higher education in England was published in August 2008 by the Credit Issues Development Group, which comprised representatives of QAA, Universities UK, GuildHE, the Higher Education Funding Council for England and other relevant practitioners and representatives. It is now maintained by QAA.
The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System

The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) is the credit system used in the European Higher Education Area. The QF-EHEA identifies ranges of ECTS credit points associated with its qualification cycles. The verification of national qualifications frameworks to the QF-EHEA has to include confirmation that ECTS, or an ECTS compatible credit framework, is used. Although there are a number of key differences between ECTS and the credit arrangements which apply within the UK, all UK credit arrangements have been confirmed as being compatible with ECTS as part of their verification processes. Many degree-awarding bodies also use ECTS to support student mobility within Europe and some in England award ECTS credit points rather than using the credit system set out in Higher education credit framework for England: guidance on academic credit arrangements in higher education in England.

Subject Benchmark Statements

Subject benchmark statements make explicit the nature and characteristics of awards in a specific subject area and set out the attributes and capabilities of graduates in that subject. Subject benchmark statements currently exist in four categories. These are:

- bachelor's degree with honours level subject benchmark statements
- master's level subject benchmark statements (in a limited number of subjects)
- subject benchmark statements for health professionals
- Scottish benchmark statements for qualifying awards for professions in Scotland which have been developed and published jointly by QAA, the relevant professional body and the Scottish Government.

Current versions of all subject benchmark statements are available at: www.qaa.ac.uk/AssuringStandardsAndQuality/subject-guidance/Pages/Subject-benchmark-statements.aspx.

The qualification descriptors in the FHEQ and FQHEIS set out generic outcomes (as noted above). In order to exemplify how these qualification outcomes might be realised in the context of delivering programmes, QAA works closely with subject communities in the higher education sector to develop subject benchmark statements.

These set out what the outcomes (in terms of knowledge, understanding and skills) and attributes identified in the qualification descriptor for a bachelor's degree with honours would look like in a specific subject area. For example, the Subject Benchmark Statement: History sets out general outcomes and attributes which would be expected of a graduate in History and is aligned to the bachelor's degree with honours qualification descriptor. Some subject benchmark statements are combined with, or make reference to, professional standards required by external professional or regulatory bodies in the discipline. Subject benchmark statements describe outcomes and attributes expected at the threshold standard and, in most cases, also at the typical or modal level of achievement. They are therefore a primary reference point both for setting academic standards when new programmes are being designed and approved and for subsequent monitoring and review since they provide academic staff with a detailed framework for specifying intended programme learning outcomes.
Subject benchmark statements also describe what gives the subject its coherence and identity, the main characteristics of programmes, and the nature of teaching, learning and assessment in that subject or subject area. However, they do not represent a national curriculum in a subject area; rather, they allow for flexibility and innovation in programme design within an overall framework. The subject areas covered by individual statements are deliberately broad, in order to be applicable to a wide range of higher education provision. Nevertheless, the aims and scope of programmes vary and may not fall clearly within the scope of a single subject benchmark statement.

More than one statement may be relevant to a programme or the programme may lie outside the coverage of the statements published to date. In such instances, higher education providers may draw upon more than one statement according to the emphases of the particular programme, or upon statements for cognate areas, as well as the generic guidance of the relevant national qualification descriptor.

The Recognition scheme for subject benchmark statements provides a means by which cases for the creation of new benchmark statements to cover emerging areas of knowledge within higher education can be made and subsequently developed.

Subject benchmark statements:

- are subject to regular review in order to ensure their continued currency and to reflect nationally agreed good practice
- are developed by the relevant academic communities through processes coordinated by QAA and in conjunction with PSRBs and employers where appropriate
- establish and/or reflect a consensus, therefore, within the academic and professional community on the nature and standards of awards
- may also be of interest to prospective students and employers seeking information about the nature and standards of awards in a given subject area.

Higher education providers are therefore expected to demonstrate that they have considered and taken account of relevant subject benchmark statements rather than show strict compliance with them.

CHAPTER A2: DEGREE-AWARDING BODIES’ REFERENCE POINTS FOR ACADEMIC STANDARDS

Expectation A2.1

The Quality Code sets out the following Expectation about degree-awarding bodies’ academic frameworks and regulations, which degree-awarding bodies are required to meet.

In order to secure their academic standards, degree-awarding bodies establish transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations to govern how they award academic credit and qualifications.
Academic Governance Arrangements and Degree-Awarding Bodies' Academic Frameworks and Regulations

Degree-awarding bodies are autonomous and have the freedom to determine which qualifications they confer (consistent with their degree awarding powers and specific legal requirements for qualifications in certain professions), whether academic credit will be used, which programmes they will offer, what the individual programme learning outcomes will be, and what the associated learning, teaching and assessment strategy should be to deliver these. In so doing, they operate within a governance framework which ensures that their responsibilities for academic standards and quality are appropriately discharged. The authority and responsibility for setting and maintaining academic standards is vested in the senior academic authority (for example the Senate or Academic Board) of the degree-awarding body. This senior academic authority determines the governance and management framework for academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities and how operational functions will be delegated. It approves the academic frameworks and regulations which form the internal reference point for academic standards and the quality assurance procedures which will be used to maintain those academic standards.

The final decision to approve or re-approve a programme, or to confirm the award of a qualification to a student rests with the degree-awarding body's senior academic authority or other body authorised to act on its behalf. Degree-awarding bodies have mechanisms in place to ensure that decisions on academic standards and quality of learning opportunities are taken separately from those which relate to business and development (though they may run in parallel) in order that academic standards are not compromised by business imperatives.

The University has a range of policy statements, regulations, frameworks and processes governing the award of qualifications and credit, including the Regulations for Awards, Regulations Governing Examinations, Qualifications and Credit Framework, summary Regulatory Framework, and an overarching statement on the assurance of academic standards of awards (taught programmes).

Senate has ultimate authority and responsibility for the standards and quality of provision. Its committee structure locates responsibility for standards in taught courses with Learning and Teaching Committee and its sub-committees, for quality with Academic Development and Enhancement Committee and its sub-committees. Research and Innovation Committee and its sub-committee, the Research Degrees Committee, have these responsibilities for research degrees. These maintain oversight of the operational procedures relating to standards and quality and substantive changes in the frameworks require approval of Senate.

Senate’s ‘Delegated Authority Framework’ sets out those powers which it has delegated to its Committees and those it has retained.

Senate has retained authority for the approval of planning of new programmes but has delegated to LTC approval of courses.

Senate has retained authority to make awards on the recommendation of Boards of Examiners.

The Academic Planning Sub-Committee and the Course Approval Sub-Committee operate separately. The latter is concerned with the academic standards of the proposal, the former addresses the viability of a proposal within the academic plan. Neither body has resource allocation responsibility. Strategic decision in regard to the merits of development of new partnerships are made by the Senior Executive Team after consideration of Initial Strategic Assessments. Boards of Examiners are concerned solely with the standard of achievement of candidates and the application of course regulations. External members of validation panels and boards of examiners help to demonstrate that the academic basis of their decision-making is not compromised.
### Academic Frameworks

Degree-awarding bodies establish their own academic frameworks (or have in place equivalent enabling provision) for both taught programmes and research degrees which set out what qualifications can be awarded, any defining requirements or characteristics for their design and, where academic credit is used, definitions of the volume and level of credit for those qualifications. These are consistent with the requirements of the relevant national frameworks for higher education qualifications and the relevant national credit framework if UK credit is awarded. Typically, any provision for credit transfer, admission with advanced standing, or recognition of prior learning (RPL) is set out as are any limits on the volume and level of these in order to secure the academic standards of their awards.

Academic frameworks are systematically and consistently applied to secure academic standards (see Chapter A3).

### Academic or Assessment Regulations

Degree-awarding bodies are responsible for determining the assessment processes which will be used to demonstrate the achievement of the intended learning outcomes of modules and programmes leading to the award of their academic credit and/or qualifications. It is a matter for individual degree-awarding bodies to determine the marking or grading schemes to be used for the assessment criteria, and to set the academic requirements for progression on a programme and the criteria for the award of a qualification (taking due account of the relevant national reference points).

Degree-awarding bodies also decide whether or not to differentiate student achievement above and below the threshold (for example, whether to classify their bachelor's or integrated master's degrees, whether to use a grade point average, and whether to award merit or distinction in other qualifications).

In order to ensure internal consistency in their academic standards, degree-awarding bodies put in place academic and/or assessment regulations which stipulate their threshold academic standards (the criteria for the award of a qualification), any requirements for progression within programmes, and the basis on which student achievement above or below the threshold is differentiated within individual qualifications (for example, how degree classifications are decided). See also Chapter B4: Enabling student development and achievement, Chapter B6: Assessment of students and the recognition of prior learning and Chapter B11: Research degrees of the Quality Code.

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The University’s Qualifications and Credit Framework and the Regulations for Awards define these characteristics. The University requires all award-bearing provision to align to the relevant national FHEQ qualification descriptor and subject benchmark statement. The University’s credit framework is aligned to the credit framework for England (2008).

Rules on credit transfer/advanced standing/APL are included in the regulations for awards and policy and operational procedures were promulgated in 2006 (TLC 06.31) (last reviewed 2011 (TLC 11.81)). These apply to all award-bearing provision.

Regulations apply to all courses consistently, with proposals for exceptions considered by the relevant committee.

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The University has generic assessment criteria for percentage mark bands, differentiated by level, standard pass marks, classification and grading schemes which apply to all taught awards and the MRes. There are generic assessment criteria for PhD and MPhil degrees. Progression and award requirements are set out in course regulations in accordance with the standard requirements.

The University classifies all awards on the basis of percentage marks except for doctorates, MPhil and a small number of courses where performance is graded pass or fail.

These are specified in award regulations.
These regulations are systematically and consistently applied to secure academic standards (see *Chapter A3*) and are regularly reviewed and maintained. In establishing and maintaining their academic frameworks and regulations, degree-awarding bodies take account of a range of external reference points for academic standards including the European Standards and Guidelines which relate to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), the UK frameworks for higher education qualifications, guidance on qualification characteristics, national credit frameworks, and Chapters in Part B of the Quality Code.

Degree-awarding bodies' academic frameworks and regulations are accessible to all intended audiences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definitive Records of Individual Programmes and Qualifications</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Expectation A2.2</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Quality Code sets out the following Expectation about the maintenance of a definitive record of each programme and qualification, which degree-awarding bodies are required to meet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree-awarding bodies maintain a definitive record of each programme and qualification that they approve (and of subsequent changes to it) which constitutes the reference point for delivery and assessment of the programme, its monitoring and review, and for the provision of records of study to students and alumni.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual degree-awarding bodies bear the responsibility for demonstrating that appropriate national threshold academic standards are set and maintained and for ensuring that there is an unambiguous understanding of the taught programme or research degree that has been approved through formally constituted processes (see <em>Chapter A3</em>). A definitive record of each programme or qualification approved and its intended learning outcomes is therefore maintained and the information shared with staff and students (including those in any other delivery organisations with whom the degree-awarding body works). The definitive record is then used as the reference point for the delivery of the programme by teaching staff/research supervisors, its assessment by internal and external examiners, and in subsequent monitoring and review. Information is recorded both at the level of any individual modules and for the programme as a whole.</td>
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</tbody>
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Standard regulations apply to all courses leading to the same award. Exceptions and departures for taught courses require specific approval of LTC and are so recorded.

The generic regulations and academic frameworks for awards are published on the University’s website, principally through the pages of the Academic Office, Student Administration, the Office of the University Secretary, and the Research Office. The Student Handbook contains summary information and course/subject handbooks provide the specific course regulations. Some documents are available in hard copy.

A basic core record is maintained through the Banner Student Records Information System which is the source of ‘records of study’. Full course documents and course revisions are maintained by the Academic Office for 25 years after a cohort’s graduation. From 2014, an online system, the Curriculum Management System maintains this information electronically.

The course document is developed by the course team which delivers the course. This information on the course and its content is provided to students through the course/subject handbook, module handbooks and associated online resources in the VLE. The course document is part of the briefing material provided to the external examiner.

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6 This includes taught or structured components of doctoral programmes.
The records are updated as and when any amendments to the programme or qualification, or its learning outcomes, are made through authorised approval processes and form the source for the record of study provided to students. See also Part C: 'Information about higher education provision' of the Quality Code.

For every module or individual unit of learning that leads to the award of credit or contributes to a qualification there is a formal record of its indicative content and structure, its constituent parts, its assessment scheme and its intended learning outcomes as approved by the degree-awarding body.

Where modules or units of learning are combined into a taught programme of study leading to a qualification (or a taught or structured component of a research degree), the definitive record of the programme (or component) sets out the intended learning outcomes and attributes for the programme as a whole. The definitive record:

- includes the level on the FHEQ or SCQF at which the qualification is located
- shows how the overall learning outcomes are aligned with the qualification descriptors in the FHEQ or FQHEIS
- shows how the programme structure is consistent with the relevant UK credit frameworks where UK credit is awarded
- shows clearly how the content and structure of the programme and its assessment strategy provide students with the opportunities for learning and assessment they need to enable them to demonstrate that they have achieved the programme learning outcomes at the requisite level
- evidences that, in designing the programme, account has been taken of relevant subject benchmark statements (see Chapter A1, page 18) and the requirements of PSRBs, where applicable
- demonstrates compliance with the academic framework and regulations of the degree-awarding body (see page 21)
- includes any approved variations or subsequent changes (see Chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review).

The CA3 course revision and revalidation processes authorise revisions.

This information is recorded on the module description.

These matters are considered through the validation process which considers alignment with the University’s Qualifications and Credit Framework (which is aligned to the national frameworks), and its regulations, and uses the relevant subject benchmarks as reference points.

Variations and changes require explicit approval through University processes and are a matter of record.
The definitive records for research degrees comprise different types of information but, at a minimum, include the subject or interdisciplinary area approved to offer research degree programmes (see Chapter B11: Research degrees), the types of qualification approved in that area and the level on the FHEQ or SCQF at which they are located together with the definitive record of any taught or structured component.

Definitive records can assume a variety of forms of which the programme specification is one. It is the responsibility of the degree-awarding body to determine the preferred format.

The definitive record, which is changed only through due process, serves as a reference point for academic and support staff involved in delivering the programme and enabling student development and achievement, internal and external examiners, and QAA reviewers. Higher education providers determine the best ways to produce and disseminate information derived from these records for their various audiences such as prospective and current students and employers (see also Part C: 'Information about higher education provision' of the Quality Code).

| CHAPTER A3: SECURING ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND AN OUTCOMES-BASED APPROACH TO ACADEMIC AWARDS |
| There are four principal ways in which degree-awarding bodies secure academic standards and quality assure the learning outcomes-based approach to academic awards in the UK, which are addressed in this Chapter. When QAA conducts reviews of degree-awarding bodies in order to quality assure providers awarding higher education qualifications (see the section 'higher education qualifications frameworks and institutional reviews' in Chapter A1, page 12), review teams assess the extent to which degree-awarding bodies execute these processes effectively. |

**Design and Approval of Modules, Programmes and Qualifications**

**Expectation A3.1**

The Quality Code sets out the following Expectation about the approval of modules, programmes and qualifications, which degree-awarding bodies are required to meet.

Degree-awarding bodies establish and consistently implement processes for the approval of taught programmes and research degrees that ensure that academic standards are set at a level which meets the UK threshold standard for the qualification and are in accordance with their own academic frameworks and regulations.
Degree-awarding bodies are responsible for the formal approval of academic programmes leading to their awards, a key function in setting academic standards. Chapter B1: Programme design, development and approval and Chapter B11: Research degrees of the Quality Code address the processes in detail. The ways in which these processes are used to secure academic standards and an outcomes-based approach to awards are summarised below.

Degree-awarding bodies ensure, through rigorous formal programme approval, that programmes meet or exceed UK threshold academic standards by requiring checks that programmes meet Expectation A1 and, in the case of research degrees, meet the Expectation of Chapter B11: Research degrees. UK threshold academic standards are secured by locating each programme at the appropriate level of the FHEQ or the SCQF; ensuring that the proposed learning outcomes are aligned with the relevant qualification descriptor in the relevant framework for higher education qualifications; taking account of guidance on qualification characteristics; assigning credit values, where UK credit is awarded, in alignment with the applicable UK credit framework; and taking account of any relevant subject benchmark statements.

Degree-awarding bodies' policies for curriculum design and development enable them to set their own academic standards above the threshold. Formal approval processes ensure that these are appropriately set by testing whether proposed modules, programmes and qualifications meet the requirements of their own academic frameworks and regulations referred to in Chapter A2.

In order to secure standards, approval processes are used to determine whether the assessment scheme adequately tests the intended learning outcomes.

Approval may be granted for a specified period after which re-approval may be required. Where the approval period is open ended, degree-awarding bodies use periodic review processes to re-affirm that the UK threshold academic standards, and their own academic standards, continue to be met.

Assessment of Learning Outcomes

Expectation A3.2

The Quality Code sets out the following Expectation about the assessment of learning outcomes, which degree-awarding bodies are required to meet.

Degree-awarding bodies ensure that credit and qualifications are awarded only where:

- the achievement of relevant learning outcomes (module learning outcomes in the case of credit and programme outcomes in the case


The University’s formal approval process has been commended in QAA Institutional Audit/Review (most recently 2010). These matters are taken account of.

The maximum period of approval is five years. A shorter period may be applied to align with the revalidation cycle. Extensions may be granted.
<table>
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<th><strong>of qualifications) has been demonstrated through assessment</strong></th>
<th><strong>See detailed analysis of B6 (2014).</strong></th>
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<td><strong>• both UK threshold standards and their own academic standards have been satisfied.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Award of credit and/or qualifications (with exception of Aegrotat and Posthumous awards) is only made following the successful demonstration of achievement of learning outcomes through assessment.</strong></td>
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<td>Assessment is used to judge student performance against the standards set. Chapter B6: Assessment of students and the recognition of prior learning and Chapter B11: Research degrees address the processes in detail but the ways in which these are used to secure academic standards and an outcomes-based approach to awards are summarised below.</td>
<td>Assessment processes are required to be valid, reliable and applied consistently, and to use internal and external moderation.</td>
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<td>For the purposes of the award of credit and/or qualifications, assessment is used to give students the opportunity to demonstrate achievement of the relevant learning outcomes. In order to ensure that UK threshold academic standards set out in Chapter A1 are met, decisions to award credit or qualifications are based on robust evidence that the module learning outcomes (for the award of credit) or programme learning outcomes (for the award of a qualification) have been achieved. In the case of research degree qualifications, learning outcomes or criteria for the award aligned to the relevant qualification descriptor are tested in assessment and demonstrated in order for an award to be made.</td>
<td>Senate has approved Regulations governing Examinations. The guiding procedures for Boards of Examiners (the formally constituted bodies) have been approved by Senate and are kept under review by the appropriate sub-committee.</td>
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<td>Degree-awarding bodies calibrate student achievement relative to the threshold standard in a consistent and systematic manner. As noted in Chapter A2, degree-awarding bodies establish their own regulations which define the standards which they set above and below the UK threshold.</td>
<td>Processes for making reasonable adjustments are in place. The Assessment Handbook addresses this point and the Equality and Diversity Services Unit provides guidance.</td>
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| Assessment decisions about the award of academic credit and/or qualifications are reached through processes approved by the senior academic authority and by decisions of formally constituted bodies to which responsibility for determining and approving awards has been delegated by that authority. | Monitoring and Review of Alignment with UK Threshold Academic Standards and Degree-Awarding Bodies’ Own Standards
**Expectation A3.3**
The Quality Code sets out the following Expectation about the monitoring and review of academic standards, which degree-awarding bodies are required to meet. |
Degree-awarding bodies ensure that processes for the monitoring and review of programmes are implemented which explicitly address whether the UK threshold academic standards are achieved and whether the academic standards required by the individual degree-awarding body are being maintained.

In order to secure academic standards, degree-awarding bodies monitor programmes regularly and review them periodically. Chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review and Chapter B11: Research degrees address the processes in detail but the ways in which these are used to secure academic standards and an outcomes-based approach to the award of credit or qualifications are summarised below.

- Monitoring ensures that programmes are delivered in accordance with what was approved (using the definitive record of the programme as the reference point).

- Monitoring and review are used to ensure that academic currency is subsequently maintained and that programmes continue to meet the UK threshold standards set out in Chapter A1 and continue to meet the degree-awarding bodies' own academic standards as defined by their academic frameworks and regulations referred to in Chapter A2.

In addition, degree-awarding bodies monitor and review their academic standards, measuring student achievement against UK and international reference points, using qualitative and quantitative management information (for example, student progression, completion and achievement data) and other comparative data of their choosing to support these activities.

See detailed commentary on B8 (2014) and B11 (2013).

Research degrees are reviewed biennially through the Periodic Review of Research Graduate Schools. This provides a formal mechanism for consideration of the performance of research degrees in each faculty against national standards; provides a forum for the identification of issues; and enables the identification and dissemination of good practice in the management of research degrees.

Course evaluation and revalidation documents are used to create the module records held in the Student Records Information System. Students enrol in accordance with this record, the definitive record. From 2014 the Curriculum Management System will hold more information from the definitive record in electronic form.

The University’s Programme Management System locates the responsibility for the ongoing review of programmes and enhancement of the student learning experience in the hands of the academic staff delivering the programme, ie the course team. Consideration of all available information including statistical data, external examiner reports, PSRB and employer engagement, student feedback and NSS results are completed as part of an ongoing cycle through Course/Subject Committee meetings. This is overseen through the normal Faculty committee structure. Annual external examiner reports give explicit consideration to academic standards. These are considered through the Programme Management System for internal courses and Annual Course Review for external courses.

The revalidation process addresses currency and provides an opportunity for course teams for stock-taking and more radical overview than the regular updating achieved through the Programme Management System or Annual Course Review monitoring processes and subsequent course revision (CA3) process.

Comparative data are used in a number of ways. HESA performance indicators and other external data sets are published on the Programme Management System web pages as a general reference tool and in addition HESA benchmark data are used as part of retention monitoring and NSS and DHLE performance is measured against national results and reported annually. This data is also used by the Annual Monitoring Sub-Committee to identify courses for central review and
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<th>Externality</th>
<th>is currently being used as the data set informing the monitoring of the Learning and Teaching Strategy process.</th>
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<td><strong>Expectation A3.4</strong></td>
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<td>The Quality Code sets out the following Expectation about external involvement in the setting and maintaining of academic standards, which degree-awarding bodies are required to meet.</td>
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<td>In order to be transparent and publicly accountable, degree-awarding bodies use external and independent expertise at key stages of setting and maintaining academic standards to advise on whether:</td>
<td></td>
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<td>• UK threshold academic standards are set, delivered and achieved</td>
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<tr>
<td>• the academic standards of the degree-awarding body are appropriately set and maintained.</td>
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<td>Degree-awarding bodies ensure that external and independent expertise is obtained at key stages of the processes for setting and maintaining academic standards. External expertise is sought to verify not only that threshold academic standards are set by rigorous reference to the national (and appropriate European) reference points but also to confirm that the degree-awarding body's internal requirements are being consistently implemented.</td>
<td>Externality applies at initial evaluation, revalidation and in the examination and assessment processes. Briefing information includes national reference points and the University's own requirements</td>
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<td>External expertise is therefore sought both when new programmes are being approved and when existing programmes are being reviewed. See further Chapter B1: Programme design, development and approval, Chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review and Chapter 11: Research degrees of the Quality Code.</td>
<td>Externality is a key element of course evaluation and revalidation.</td>
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<td>External examiners are appointed to provide impartial advice and recommendations as to whether assessment demonstrates that threshold academic standards are achieved and that academic standards relative to the threshold are calibrated in accordance with the degree-awarding body's regulations. See also Chapter B7: External examining and Chapter B11: Research degrees of the Quality Code.</td>
<td>Externals examiners are appointed for all award-bearing courses and credit-bearing modules.</td>
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