# QAA Institutional Review: Action Plan

At its meeting on 20 March 2013, the University Board for Teaching and Learning approved the following Action Plan in respect of the key findings of the QAA Institutional Review in November 2012.  In accordance with the QAA's guidance, the action plan addresses the features of good practice, recommendations and affirmations.

The action plan was updated on 9 July 2013 to include reports on progress (in italics).

## Good practice

(a) **The Pathfinder process makes a significant contribution to strengthening the University's well thought out, rigorous and comprehensive periodic review system.**
*IR Report, paragraph 1.4.1*

Following completion of a full cycle of the Pathfinder process covering all Schools and departments, the process is currently under review and proposals for a new enhancement process will shortly be submitted to the Sub-Committee for the Delivery and Enhancement of Teaching and Learning and thence to the University Board for Teaching and Learning.

The University recognises the major benefits which Pathfinder offers to Schools and equally the limitations imposed by the six-year cycle on which the process runs. In the current environment, there is evident merit in operating an enhancement model derived from Pathfinder—engaging Schools in sharply focussed, in-depth, evidence-based discussion of issues and enhancement opportunities—on a more frequent cycle. It will therefore be proposed that the University evolves Pathfinder into a new School Planning and Enhancement of Learning and Teaching process (SPELT) which will run on an annual cycle and will support the annual three-year rolling planning process and also the annual programme report process. The annual SPELT process will continue to inform periodic reviews as they occur.  Under the proposals, the Head of School and the School Director of Teaching and Learning will meet annually with the relevant Associate Dean (Teaching and Learning) (ADTL) to review key data sets, including NSS results, and to identify enhancement priorities for the School. The ADTLs will subsequently review the enhancement priorities of all Schools and determine which priorities should be assigned central support for development, having regard to the number of Schools which share the same or cognate priorities and to those priorities which are most pressing. It is anticipated that Schools will hold a meeting prior to the SPELT process to discuss data and possible enhancement priorities. The increased periodicity of the SPELT process means that the engagement with Schools will necessarily be less intense,

and that the allocation of central support will be more sharply focussed and will be more closely aligned with the University's centrally identified priorities.

The new SPELT process will apply the principles of Pathfinder in ways which are better adapted to the current, rapidly changing, increasingly competitive environment.

The Periodic Review process will be reviewed to ensure that there are no detrimental consequences arising from the evolution from Pathfinder to the SPELT process.

*The University Board for Teaching and Learning formally approved the introduction of the SPELT process at its meeting on 20 May 2013, and the first SPELT meetings between the ADTL, School Director of Teaching and Learning and Head of School are currently being held.*

*Revisions to the Periodic Review process, which took account of the discontinuation of Pathfinder, were approved by the University Board for Teaching and Learning on 9 July 2013.*

(b) **The University offers excellent web-based multimedia support for staff in relation to assessment and feedback.**
*IR Report, paragraph 4.3*

The online resource on assessment and feedback continues to be maintained. The University continues to develop multimedia resources for teaching and learning and to use the widely recognised and successful 'Engage in…' brand to provide effective support for staff.

*At the request of the QAA, the University has contributed a case study on Engage in Assessment and Engage in Feedback for inclusion in the QAA's Good Practice Knowledge Base.*

## Recommendations

(c) **The University should introduce and address at institutional level a thematic summary of external examiners' reports.**
*IR Report, paragraph 1.2.2*

The University will introduce with effect from 2013/14 an annual thematic summary of external examiners' reports which will be considered by the Sub-Committee on the Delivery and Enhancement of Learning and Teaching for report to the University Board for Teaching and Learning. It is anticipated that the report will be received by the Sub-Committee along with the Faculty Annual Quality Assurance Reports in the Spring Term each year. A detailed proposal will be submitted to the Sub-Committee on the Delivery and Enhancement of Learning and Teaching at its meeting on 24 April 2013.

In anticipation of the process, a thematic report of undergraduate and postgraduate external examiners' reports in respect of 2011/12 will be submitted to Sub-Committee on the Delivery and Enhancement of Learning and Teaching in the Summer Term 2013.

*At its meeting on 20 May 2013, the University Board for Teaching and Learning approved a proposal that an annual thematic summary of external examiners' reports be received by the Sub-Committee on the Delivery and Enhancement of Learning and Teaching for report to the University Board for Teaching and Learning. A thematic summary of external examiners' reports in respect of 2011/12 was received by the Sub-Committee on the Delivery and Enhancement of Learning and Teaching received at its meeting on 24 April 2013 and by the University Board for Teaching and Learning at its meeting on 20 May 2013.*

(d) **The University should ensure that the final approval procedure for all new joint honours programmes includes external academic advice appropriate to both disciplines.**
*IR Report, paragraph 1.4*

Draft amendments to the University's procedures for approval of new programmes and amendment of existing programmes will be submitted to the Sub-Committee on the Delivery and Enhancement of Learning and Teaching on 24 April 2013. The draft amendments will stipulate that:

(i)     in the case of new programmes which consist largely of new modules, an external subject specialist for each discipline should be appointed to the scrutiny panel;

(ii)    in the case of new programmes which largely consist of existing modules, at least one external examiner from each of the contributing disciplines should be consulted on the proposed programme.

*Draft amendments to the University's procedures for approval of new programmes and amendment of existing programmes were submitted to the Sub-Committee on the Delivery and Enhancement of Learning and Teaching at its meeting on 24 April 2013. The draft amendments, together with further draft amendments, were approved by the University Board for Teaching and Learning at its meeting on 9 July 2013.*

(e) **The University should, formally and in advance of their commencing teaching on University programmes, approve the curricula vitae of all relevant partner institution staff.**
*IR Report, paragraph 2.1.1*

A requirement that the curricula vitae of all relevant partner institution staff be formally approved by the University in advance of their commencing teaching on a University programme will be included in the *Guidelines on the design of undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes* and *Approval of a new programme*. The requirement will also be stipulated in the Memorandum of Agreement and the Operational Handbook for each collaborative programme. A detailed proposal will be submitted to Sub-Committee on the Delivery and Enhancement of Learning and Teaching on 24 April 2013.

*Draft amendments to the University's procedures for approval of new programmes and amendment of existing programmes were submitted to the Sub-Committee on the Delivery and Enhancement of Learning and Teaching at its meeting on 24 April 2013. The draft amendments, together with further draft amendments, were approved by the University Board for Teaching and Learning at its meeting on 9 July 2013. The requirement for approval of*

*curricula vitae has been incorporated into the Memorandum of Agreement and Operational Handbook templates.*

(f)  **The University should ensure that no research degree student has a sole supervisor.**
*IR Report, paragraph 2.10.1*

The University has amended its Code of Practice on Research Students to specify that, with effect from October 2013, all postgraduate research students will have a second supervisor.  Second supervisors are currently being appointed for the small proportion of existing postgraduate research students who currently have a sole supervisor.

*Arrangements are in hand to ensure that second supervisors will be appointed by October 2013 for the remainder of research students who currently have a sole supervisor.  All new research students will have been assigned a second supervisor by the end of their first term of registration.*

## Affirmations

(g)  **The University is currently undertaking a project designed to systematise and strengthen the assessment feedback provided for students.**
*IR Report, paragraph 1.3.1*

The University Board for Teaching and Learning has approved provisions that a standard turnaround time of fifteen working days from the due date for submission be introduced for the return of feedback on formative and summative coursework for all undergraduate and taught postgraduate modules.  Major pieces of work, such as dissertations and final year projects will be exempt from the standard requirement, subject to the proviso that work submitted in the Summer Term of the Final Part should be returned prior to Graduation. There will be provisions for strictly limited variations to the standard requirements.  The implementation date for the proposal will be October 2014 since the assessment regimes for some modules will need to be reviewed, but, in the meantime, Schools are being encouraged to meet a fifteen working day turnaround time wherever possible. Work is continuing to develop guidelines on the communication of assessment criteria.

*Schools are being supported in reviewing feedback processes to ensure that they are able to meet the University's requirement to provide feedback within 15 working days by the Session 2014/15.*

(h)  **The University is currently undertaking a project designed to systematise and strengthen the personal tutoring system.**
*IR Report, paragraph 2.1.2*

The report of the working group on personal tutoring will be considered by the Sub-Committee on Student Support on 19 April 2013 and will then be referred to the University Board for Teaching and Learning.  The recommendations include proposals to extend the personal tutoring system, to improve the records of meetings, and to align fully with the NUS Charter on Personal Tutoring.

*At its meeting on 9 July 2013, the University Board for Teaching and Learning approved the report of the working group on personal tutoring and established an implementation group to oversee the implementation of the recommendations.*

(i)     **The University has decided to implement the recommendations of its recently-completed review of programme and module evaluation.**
        *IR Report, paragraph 2.3.1*

        A paper containing a draft policy and procedures for programme and module evaluation will be submitted to the Sub-Committee on the Delivery and Enhancement of Learning and Teaching on 24 April 2013 for onward transmission to the University Board for Teaching and Learning.  The policy and procedures, which will be effective from October 2013, will operationalise the recommendations approved by the University Board for Teaching and Learning on 5 November 2012.

        *At its meeting on 9 July 2013, the University Board for Teaching and Learning approved proposals for the implementation of the new programme and module evaluation procedures.*

                                        Keith Swanson
                                        Director of Academic Quality Support

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