Quick Guide on Quality Assurance

What is University Quality Assurance?

Main principles

The University of Birmingham (UoB) is a self-governing higher education institution that has the power to award its own degrees (amongst other qualifications). As part of this power the qualifications that it awards must meet nationally agreed standards and expectations, which are set by the Regulators for the programmes and awards that are offered at UoB.

Quality Assurance (QA) is the process (in reality, a variety of different processes) for checking that the standards and quality of the University's higher education provision meet these agreed standards and expectations.

Academic Policy and Quality Framework

The University of Birmingham's "Academic Policy and Quality Framework" (APQF) sets out the mechanisms for assuring and enhancing the quality of its academic provision, leading to the outcomes and standards expected by their Regulators. Their Regulators are the:
- Office for Students (OfS)
- Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA)
- Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted)

The APQF includes University Legislation, academic procedures, and review mechanisms, all of which are overseen by sub-committees of the University Senate. Central to the APQF are the following quality assurance processes:
- Programme Approval and Review
- External Examiner System
- Student Representation System
- Educational Enhancement

Office for Students (OfS)

The OfS is the regulator for higher education in England. They protect the interests of students by supporting a diverse and independent higher education sector. The OfS do this by focusing on three main areas: Quality and Standards; Equality of Opportunity; and Student Protection.

In order to award degrees, UoB must be registered with the OfS. There are various conditions (A-G) that the University is required to meet and maintain in order to stay registered, the B conditions are amongst these. The B conditions focus on quality, reliable standards, and positive outcomes for all students. The QA processes at UoB are designed to ensure that they continually meet the B conditions.

Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA)

The CAA is the national quality assurance and regulatory agency responsible for evaluation and accreditation of higher educational institutions and universities in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The University of Birmingham Dubai (UoBD) therefore needs to be registered with the CAA in order to be able to offer degrees in the UAE / Dubai. Similarly to registering with the OfS, the University of Birmingham Dubai needs to meet and maintain various standards to be registered with the CAA, and the QA processes that are used at UoB are also used at UoBD to ensure that we meet the CAA's standards and expectations.

Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted)

The University of Birmingham offer apprenticeship programmes, which will allow students to receive one of the many awards that we can offer. Like all other programmes, apprenticeships also need to meet and maintain certain standards and expectations. Ofsted is the government organisation that is responsible for inspecting the quality of apprenticeships at all levels, which makes it the single body responsible for their quality assurance. This means that Ofsted carries out inspections of apprenticeship training at universities and colleges registered with the OfS.

Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA)

The QAA is the UK's higher education sector's independent expert quality body. The QAA reviews standards and quality in higher education, producing key sector guidance and providing practical support. The QAA maintains sector-owned reference points, including the Quality Code for Higher Education, Subject Benchmark Statements, and Credit Frameworks. The Quality Code sets out twelve sector-agreed principles for securing academic standards and ensuring and enhancing quality. UoBs QA processes align with these sector-agreed principles.

Further information

For more information regarding Quality Assurance, please visit:
- Quality Assurance and Enhancement at the University of Birmingham: https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/university/leadership/governance/quality
- The University of Birmingham's Academic Policy and Quality Framework: https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/registry/policy/quality/index.aspx
- The QAA's UK Quality Code for Higher Education 2024 - Sector-Agreed Principles: https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/uk-quality-code-for-higher-education-2024-sector-agreed-principles.pdf

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