POLICY ON QUALITY ASSURANCE AND MANAGEMENT

Preamble

Quality is in the centre of all university activities, with a focus on raising standards, recognizing achievement and promoting a positive and collaborative culture. The policy covers all activities and stakeholders within the institution as well as those activities sub-contracted externally.

The aims are to:

- promote a culture in which every faculty, department and individual sees quality improvement as both a personal and collective responsibility;
- develop institutional strategy, policies, procedures, processes and initiatives which support an effective cycle of planning, implementing, monitoring and improvement; and which take account of the external context;
- design, develop, validate and regularly review internally and externally all study programmes in accordance with legal standards and best practice in the field; and ensure that learning outcomes and assessment practice are fit for purpose;
- support effective learning and teaching which combines a research-led approach with student centred learning;
- use data and other analytical material and good practice guidance to ensure that judgments and decisions are open, transparent and clearly supported with relevant information;
- ensure that important reports and evaluations, including this Policy, are publicized;
- protect academic integrity and freedom and be vigilant against academic fraud;
- ensure mutual respect, equity and protection from intolerance and/or discrimination;
- make best use of national and international standards and best practice, particularly with regard to trends in the European Higher Education Area and Bologna Standards and Guidelines (see ESG 15, Standard, Part 1.1.1);
- share and disseminate information and decision-making with all stakeholders in order to ensure that everyone is involved, achievements are recognized and rewarded and performance, including under performance, is effectively managed.

Definition

This Policy describes the Quality Assurance and Management system at the University.

When creating, developing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating policies, procedures, structures and quality initiatives, the University takes a structured, integrated approach incorporating quality assurance and management, defined as follows:

- Quality assurance focuses on academic matters such as curriculum design, programme accreditation, internal and external review, academic standards and ethics. It also

includes teaching and learning and links closely with those services which directly support students, such as the Library, Student Services and the Career Centre;

- Quality management targets the effective development, implementation and monitoring of policies and procedures and the quality of administrative sections and services.

Internal quality structure and roles

The University maintains and regularly reviews an internal quality structure to ensure that it is fit for purpose (See Appendix 1).

This incorporates the following entities and roles:

- ***The University Board*** adopts the four yearly Strategic Plan, of which quality assurance and management are important parts, and has ultimate responsibility for governance. It also adopts the triennial Self Evaluation report.
- ***The Rector*** leads on quality matters through the ***Quality Assurance and Management Commission (QAMC)*** and s/he is responsible to the Board. The Commission consists of the Rector, Provost, Secretary General, Pro-Rector for Academic Issues and Executive Advisor for Quality, as well as two Coordinators on a two year rotational basis from the Faculty/Centre Committees for Quality Assurance, Cooperation and Public Trust. Technical support is provided by the Quality Officer. The Commission meets at least two times each academic year to take an overview and provide overall direction.
- ***The Senate –*** appoints the Self-Evaluation Commission and adopts its triennial report and yearly progress reports. It also has decision making authority and therefore oversight of quality over a range of academic matters such as the approval of academic study rules, enrollment call, accreditation of programmes and promotion of specified academic titles.
- ***The Self-Evaluation Commission***, which is appointed by the Senate, is responsible for the production every three years of a University wide Self-Assessment Report in accordance with the required criteria and process and using Faculty/Centre Self-Evaluation Reports. It also provides yearly progress updates.
- ***Committee for Quality Assurance, Cooperation and Public Trust*** function in every Faculty and the Language Centre. The team includes staff, students and external stakeholders. It is established by the Dean/Director and approved by the Faculty Council with a one year mandate. They analyze relevant data, discuss quality issues, programmes to be accredited, and provide advice, proposals and recommendations to the Faculty, Senate or other university organs as appropriate, for improvement. They provide reflective analysis to support the Unit Annual Action Plan as well as for the triannual institutional Self-Evaluation Report.
- ***The Faculty Council –*** is the professional organ of the Faculty and advisory to the Dean for academic and quality issues;
- ***The Collegium*** consists of Directors/Heads of administrative services and they discuss relevant quality issues on a regular basis, under the direction of the Secretary General.

- *A Quality Assurance Office* coordinates the operation of quality assurance activities and processes, student evaluation surveys and central training activities. It supports the Quality Teams/Boards for Cooperation and Public Confidence and central commissions, leads on specific quality initiatives, ensures that information is disseminated and that a positive quality culture is promoted through a range of communication mechanisms.
- *The ISO Team* is appointed by the Secretary General and works on establishment and maintenance of the Quality Management System at the University.
- *Student contribution to quality enhancement* – Student representatives attend the University Board, Senate, Rector's Council, Faculty Council, Quality Team/Board for Confidence and Public Trust and are regularly invited to provide input and monitoring of university activities as well as training sessions.
- *The Student Ombudsperson* - has the role of resolving student issues which have not been settled by more informal means.

Setting and maintaining standards

All programmes are designed and (re)accredited with reference to the Law on Higher Education, the National Education Framework and the process managed by the National Accreditation and Evaluation Board. Institutionally, this process is overseen by the Pro-rector for Academic Affairs. The Faculty Dean's Office is responsible for coordinating the design or re-accreditation of programmes. This process also includes the Faculty Boards of Cooperation and Public Trust, which are composed of external stakeholders, students and staff. This has the purpose of providing an objective evaluation of the programme aim and objectives in relation to the labour market and societal benefit.

The University guarantees academic freedom to Faculty members in both research and teaching. In order to uphold general standards of grading quality, each Faculty maintains an exam archive which is monitored for compliance and quality. Faculties are encouraged to practice peer monitoring and cross marking and Faculty members are encouraged to use exam marking rubrics.

The Study Cycle Rules, Plagiarism Report Template, as well as the Disciplinary Rules above provide clear guidance concerning the maintenance of academic integrity. The Rules on Scientific Research, Promotion in Title, and the application of the Research database in combination with the Rules above cover the same for staff.

An annual analysis of grading data is conducted as part of the quality monitoring.

Institutional methods of quality assurance

In order to develop a positive quality culture, respond to change and the need for improvement, the University uses a range of internal mechanisms including those described below.

- The quality of learning and teaching is maintained and developed through a Teaching Observation scheme, yearly student evaluations, individual staff evaluation and professional development opportunities.
- The annual procedure for Staff Evaluation provides an important measure for assessing individual performance as a basis for contract renewal, progress and promotion. This is underpinned by competence, grievance, working time and disciplinary rules or procedures.
- The university operates a performance management contract for academic staff, related to research output. There is also an annual award scheme for the Scholarship of Learning and Teaching.
- ISO standards for policies and procedures are monitored through a trained internal audit team on an annual basis, and are approved by external ISO validation.
- University Finances are monitored by the Internal Auditor and also by an External Audit Office which is internationally accredited.
- Staff and student satisfaction is also reviewed through student evaluations and staff satisfaction surveys. The university operates a Student Complaint Procedure and supports the Student Ombudsperson in their work.
- In addition to institutional and departmental self-evaluation cycles, each academic and administrative units prioritize and articulate their strengths, weaknesses and priorities in annual Action Plans which are moderated, widely disseminated and used actively.
- The University offers regular staff training, both general and targeted and supports staff with qualification requirements, research publication and mobility.
- There are quality initiatives which focus on a specific aspect such as the assessment of students or the development of electronic systems and digital learning.

External quality assurance

In order to develop a quality culture, the University complies with relevant legal requirements, and uses a range of external evaluative mechanisms to develop excellent practice, including but not limited to the following:

- Compliance with the Law on Higher Education and other relevant laws. This includes cooperation with the Ministry of Education and related agencies as well as the National Accreditation and Evaluation Board, with an emphasis on using these to extend good practice;

- External evaluation through accredited External Agencies as part of the European Universities Association (EUA) which provides objective external evaluation on a four year cycle in an initial and follow-on evaluation (initial and follow on evaluations now completed);
- Annual visits by the SEEU Quality Champion(s) (QC) who provide(s) targeted evaluation and review, with recommendations for improvements and follow-up.
- External Programme Reviews on a four to six year cycle to provide Faculties and/or academic units with analysis and recommendations to support their development;

- ISO external standards are applied, with annual re-validation, in order to verify the effectiveness of key policies and procedures.
- Participation in EHEA projects, conferences and other forums, as well as active and regular consideration of trends and best practice promoted internationally.

Information to staff, students and stakeholders

The University ensures that published information about its provision is fit for purpose, accessible, reliable and in all the University languages. This is supervised by the PR Office. Relevant data are regularly reviewed for improvement.

Equality impact statement

This Policy is implemented in line with the principles of the University's commitment to equality and diversity summarized in the Mission Statement. This includes fair and equal treatment for all employees and university users, respect for diversity and implementation of the university's flexible language policy.

The Policy on Equal Opportunities as well as the Staff and Student Disciplinary Rules support the University in tackling discrimination and ensuring respect and equality of opportunity and academic freedom.

Final provisions

This Policy on Quality Assurance and Management is reviewed as part of the three yearly self-evaluation process by the Quality Assurance and Management Commission and Faculty/Departmental Quality Teams.

Appendix 1
Quality Structure