Quality Assurance Code of Practice

Professional Accreditation

1. Purpose and scope

1.1 Professional accreditation is the official recognition awarded by an external professional or statutory body as the result of the University meeting specific standards or criteria. These criteria or standards may relate to the recognition of the academic standing of a programme, department or School, the ability to produce graduates with professional competence to practice and/or preparation for professional status. The function of the accrediting body may encompass:

- recognition of the quality of a programme or set of programmes e.g. Physiotherapy;
- recognition of the quality of a Department/School e.g. School of Management;
- accreditation of programmes for professional entry, e.g. Architecture and Engineering;
- statutory responsibilities, with legal powers to represent, e.g. Medicine;
- regulatory responsibilities, with inspectorial function, e.g. teacher training provision.

1.2 The purposes of these procedures are:

- to support Faculties/Departments/the School/Learning Partnerships Office (LPO) in their preparations for seeking or renewing accreditation
- to enable an appropriate institutional overview to be maintained of any accreditation by an external body that is being sought in the University's name.

1.3 These procedures apply to all programmes, leading to an award of the University of Bath and academic departments1/the School for which accreditation by external bodies is being sought or renewed, including those involving collaborative provision. This includes instances where accreditation is being sought for part rather than the whole of a programme.

1.4 Peer review through professional accreditation supplements the University's own mechanisms for monitoring and review of its programmes. It draws upon and contributes to the related processes of External Examining (QA12), Annual Monitoring of Units and Programmes (QA51) and Degree Scheme Review (QA13).

2. Principles

2.1 The University is committed to a distinctive academic approach that emphasises the education of professional practitioners, the application of learning, and graduate employability. Alongside the University’s own review and monitoring mechanisms, the aim of professional accreditation is to secure for students a high quality academic and professional experience and also to provide enhanced opportunities for graduates entering their chosen profession.

2.2 It is important that an institutional overview of accreditation is maintained. Internal

1 the procedures do not therefore apply to the Department for Sports Development and Recreation’s relationships with professional accrediting bodies.
ownership and leadership of accreditation exercises rests principally at the level of the discipline with the Department/School/LPO/Partner being best placed to present information upon its academic provision. Nonetheless, the legal entity being accredited is the University and the provision being accredited, while owned and/or managed by a Department/School/the LPO/Partner, leads to awards of the University. Accreditation reports also contribute to the profile against which institutional management of standards is publicly audited. Professional services are able to provide support to Departments/School/the LPO in presenting supporting information about institutional policies and processes. The same considerations apply where a partner organisation is seeking accreditation for a collaborative programme leading to an award of the University of Bath.

3. Roles and responsibilities

3.1 The Department/School/LPO is responsible in liaison with the Assistant Registrar (or equivalent) for:
- timely notification to University staff and committees of forthcoming accreditation exercises, and submission deadlines (ideally at least 6 months' notice)
- preparation and submission of accreditation documentation in line with the expectations of the University and accrediting body
- preparations for associated accreditation visits
- seeking Faculty and institutional advice upon and endorsement of all accreditation submissions including interim and annual reports
- co-ordinating the Department/School/LPO response to the recommendations of the accrediting body
- notifying the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Office (LTEO), the Faculty or School Learning, Teaching & Quality Committee and the Programmes and Partnerships Approvals Committee of the outcome of the accreditation process.

3.2 The Head of Department/School or the Head of LPO is responsible for managing the process of preparing for and following up on accreditation, and for identifying a member(s) of staff to act as a point of liaison.

3.3 The Assistant Registrars (or equivalent) are the primary source of advice on preparing professional accreditation submissions (taking advice from the LTEO where appropriate) and navigating the professional accreditation submission signing off process. Assistant Registrars also ensure that accurate and timely information is provided to the LTEO about accreditation exercises and submission deadlines (ideally at least 6 months' notice) and the outcomes.

3.4 The Faculty/School Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee (F/SLTQC) is responsible for reviewing and approving draft accreditation submissions for recommendation to the Programmes and Partnerships Approval Committee (apart from those aspects concerning institutional policies and processes), and for considering the resulting accreditation report and departmental progress on the necessary action arising from it.

3.5 The Programmes and Partnerships Approval Committee (PAPAC) considers and approves all accreditation documentation on behalf of the University for submission to the professional body.

3.6 The Learning and Teaching Enhancement Office (LTEO) is responsible for:
- maintaining a central register of professional accreditations awarded to the institution
- providing advice to Assistant Registrars (or equivalent) on the content and presentation of accreditation submissions as requested
- reviewing the presentation of institutional processes and policies in professional
4. **Accreditation preparation and submission**

4.1 The School/Faculty/LPO are responsible for providing accurate and timely information about accreditation exercises. However, the LTEO will enquire annually to confirm those expected to take place the following academic session, and to seek notification of any new accreditation being sought. In order to assist it is advisable for forthcoming accreditation exercises to be flagged up in Annual Planning documentation and in Annual Monitoring reports for the relevant programme (see QA51: Annual Monitoring and the annual monitoring templates).

4.2 The central accreditation register held by LTEO will inform the schedule for Degree Scheme Reviews (see QA13 Degree Scheme Reviews). Degree Scheme Reviews will normally take place one year before accreditation in order that the internal review process may inform preparations for external accreditation. However, in appropriate cases, a closer alignment between a Degree Scheme Review and a professional accreditation process may be permitted. In such instances, the approval of the University Learning, Teaching & Quality Committee will be required, and may be granted providing that the underlying objectives of both will still broadly be met.

4.3 The Department/School/LPO will draft the accreditation submission and assemble the supporting evidence base. This may entail requests for information to other Departments (e.g., Departments contributing a unit to a programme, or professional service such as the Library or Computing Services) for which timeliness in both notification and response is expected.

The standard text on **Indicators of Quality** and the links contained therein, used in programme specifications, is often valuable in preparing the sections on quality in the institutional context for professional accreditation.

### Good Practice

Each accrediting body will have its own criteria for accreditation submissions and the supporting evidence base, and first and foremost, Departments/School/the LPO will be seeking to satisfy these. However, the following prompts are provided to assist Departments/School/the LPO in structuring their approach. These are drawn from feedback from Directors of Studies and Heads of Departments who have recently participated in accreditation exercises:

- establish a clear timeline for compiling the accreditation submission and assembling the associated evidence base that allows sufficient time to seek peer review from colleagues in the Department/School/LPO and elsewhere in the institution, and takes into account the need to gain institutional endorsement (see indicative timeline)
- make sure that progress made since any previous accreditation exercise or the most recent Degree Scheme Review is clearly set out. In particular, outline the Department/School/LPO’s response to the recommendations made in the previous accreditation
- when making claims about the quality and standing of a programme or aspect of provision, ensure that these claims are evidence-based. Peer review from External Examiners and Degree Scheme Reviews can be helpful here, as can student involvement, either through direct involvement in accreditation visits, or indirectly through feedback from surveys and Staff/Student Liaison Committees
- make an evaluative and balanced case, not forgetting to highlight areas of particular good practice and strength, but also indicating those areas where you
have recognised scope for improvement and have plans in place to address these issues. A balanced appraisal linked with a clear plan of action is one indicator of mature and robust quality management and is more likely to meet the expectations of the accrediting body.

- place the development of the programme and the Department/School/LPO within the broader context of University strategy and processes (This is where advice from the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Office can be of particular help)
- one practical point on developing the evidence base: avoid transferring personal data outside the University without checking the position with regard to Data Protection (See [http://www.bath.ac.uk/internal/data-protection/guidelines.htm](http://www.bath.ac.uk/internal/data-protection/guidelines.htm)).

4.4 Completed draft submissions should be presented to Faculty/School Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee to review and approve for recommendation to the Programme and Partnerships Approval Committee.

4.5 Following scrutiny by the Faculty/School Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee, a copy of the final version of the key accreditation documents should be provided to the LTEO which will check the accuracy of any institutional-level information and then submit the documentation to the Programmes and Partnerships Approval Committee. The role of this Committee is to provide institutional endorsement of the documentation being submitted in the University's name.

4.6 If the deadline for the submission of documentation does not match with an appropriately timed Committee, the Chair of the Programmes and Partnerships Approval Committee will consider approval of the key final submission documents on behalf of the University, subject to adequate prior warning and time for review of the paperwork. The Chair of the Committee may also require final amendments to the documentation before its dispatch, as a condition of approval. These arrangements should be planned in advance and co-ordinated by the Assistant Registrar (or equivalent).

4.7 Where professional bodies require electronic submission of extensive documentation the Secretaries of the Faculty/School Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee and Programmes and Partnerships Approval Committee should be consulted early on in the process to determine how the Committee’s responsibilities for scrutiny are best fulfilled.

4.8 For accreditation exercises involving an accreditation agreement, advice on the draft agreement should be sought through the Assistant Registrar (or equivalent) from the LTEO and the University's Legal Adviser, prior to approval of the agreement being sought from the Faculty/School Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee.

4.9 Following endorsement of the accreditation submission by the University Programmes and Partnerships Approval Committee, the Department/School/LPO is responsible for the delivery of the accreditation submission to the accrediting body.

5. **Accreditation visits**

5.1 Where required arrangements for an accreditation visit are primarily the responsibility of the Department/School/LPO in liaison with the Assistant Registrar (or equivalent). However, by prior arrangement and agreement, it is possible for a member of the LTEO to be available to answer additional questions on institutional quality management issues.

5.2 A number of accrediting bodies expect to meet a member of the institutional senior management team (such as the Vice-Chancellor or a Pro-Vice-Chancellor) and/or the institutional head of quality management such as the Director of Learning and Teaching
Enhancement or the Head of Student Learning, Experience and Quality during accreditation visits. Where this is likely to be a requirement, Departments/the School/LPO are asked to give as much prior notice as possible, and to provide a copy of the key accreditation documentation (for example, the evaluative commentary or an executive summary) to all participants to whom it has not already been supplied at least seven days prior to the visit.

6. **Following accreditation: monitoring and review**

6.1. Following the accreditation process, the Department/School/LPO is responsible for drafting a response to the accreditation report, and for planning actions in response to any recommendations made by the accrediting body.

6.2. Faculty/School/Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee is responsible for approving action plans and monitoring their progress. The committee also has discretion to determine the appropriate form of monitoring on a case by case basis (see 6.5 below).

6.3. In instances where the accrediting body's recommendations create a potential conflict with the University's academic framework or regulations (see Annex A to QA3 Approval of New Programmes of Study, or NFA:AR), the advice of the LTEO should be sought (through the Assistant Registrar or equivalent) before a response is made by the Department/School/ LPO to the accrediting body, or a case is made to the Programmes and Partnerships Approval Committee for exemption from the Academic Framework.

6.4. Copies of the accreditation report accompanied by the response, should be forwarded to the

- Vice-Chancellor;
- the Dean/Head of School;
- the LTEO (for maintenance of the professional accreditation register);
- the Secretary to PAPAC (for report to that Committee); and
- the Secretary to the Faculty/School Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee.

6.5. In considering these reports, the Faculty/School Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee will:

- identify examples of good practice
- identify particular issues raised regarding the provision being accredited
- approve the action plan and determine the appropriate form of monitoring (see 6.1 above)
- maintain a Faculty/School-wide overview of issues being raised by accrediting bodies and raise any substantial or recurrent issues for institutional action with the University Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee.

6.6. Copies of subsequent correspondence with and from professional accrediting bodies linked to conditions and recommendations will be circulated to the Assistant Registrar and the LTEO.

6.7. The Assistant Registrar will inform the LTEO of the outcomes of all professional accreditation applications to assure maintenance of the Professional Accreditation Register.
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