

SENATE

Title of paper: Report of assurance of quality and standards 2024-25

Main purpose of the paper: For decision

Presenter(s): Professor Ruth Valentine

Date of paper: 20 November 2025

Purpose of the paper

The paper is the annual report of quality and standards, which will be submitted to Council following Senate.

Relation to strategy and values

Education Strategy

Recommendations:

To approve the paper for Council.

Consultation to date (including any previous committee consideration and its outcome):

The report was considered by University Education Committee.

REPORT TO UNIVERSITY EDUCATION COMMITTEE (UEC)							
20 November 2025							
Report on assurance of quality and standards 2024-25							
Summary:	This paper provides a report for onward transmission to Senate and Council summarising the University's fulfilment of the general ongoing conditions of registration with the Office for Students related to quality and standards (B conditions) in 2024-25.						
Background:	<p>As an independent awarding body the University has a responsibility to effectively manage the academic quality of its provision and the standards of its awards.</p> <p>As a registered provider with the Office for Students we are also required to meet the general ongoing conditions of registration. The B conditions cover all aspects of the quality and standards of provision. This paper covers conditions B1-B5. The University has also fulfilled its requirement under B6 to take part in the Teaching Excellence Framework through its participation in the last cycle of this assessment in 2022-23.</p>						
Relation to Strategy:	Education Strategy						
Resource Implications (People, Time, Money):	None						
Equality Analysis undertaken (if Yes, please attach; if No, please justify)	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	X			
	EDI dimensions of this area of activity are addressed through other institutional reports.						
Consultation:	There are no specific issues or questions which required consultation.						
Governance trajectory to date	None						
Governance trajectory following UEC:	Following consideration by UEC on 20 November the paper will be considered by Senate on 14 January 2025, Council on 19 January 2026.						
Resolution Required:	To endorse the paper (Annex A) for further consideration at Senate and Council						
Approval	X	Endorsement/ Recommendation	<input type="checkbox"/>	Discussion	<input type="checkbox"/>	Information	<input type="checkbox"/>
Risks and implications included	Yes		x	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	N/A	<input type="checkbox"/>

Is the paper to be closed? (If yes, please state the reason below):	No
Author(s):	Rachel Dearlove
Date of paper:	11 November 2025

Assurance of academic quality and standards 2024-25

Background

1. This paper summarises the operation of the University's framework for the management of academic quality and standards, to demonstrate that Newcastle is meeting national regulatory requirements in this area.

National regulatory requirements

2. The 2017 Higher Education and Research Act established the Office for Students (OfS), and under the powers granted by this Act OfS has put in place a Regulatory Framework for English Higher Education Providers (HEPs). A key instrument of regulation is the requirement that all HEPs must register with the OfS if they want to access public teaching grant funding, access the student support system (i.e. student loans), or recruit international students. The University was admitted to the OfS Register of HEPs in 2018 and is subject to the ongoing conditions of registration.
3. The OfS published a revised regulatory framework in March 2022 with implementation from May 2022 for (B1, B2, B4 and B5) and October 2022 for B3. The [revised B conditions](#) cover all higher education courses, at any level (including PGR), any volume of study and provided face to face or distance learning or a combination. This also covers courses delivered through educational partnerships where Newcastle is the awarding body. This report provides an update against each of the conditions in turn, as well as broader commentary on relevant activity relating to the quality and standards of our programmes.
4. The B conditions are 'threshold standards' that sit underneath the expectations of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) which assesses 'excellence' well above baseline expectations. TEF criteria are, however, matched to the B conditions. The University's Silver overall, Bronze student experience and Silver student outcomes awards also provide reassurance that we are meeting regulatory expectations.

Sector developments in the quality assurance landscape

5. July 2025 saw the publication of the initial advice and guidance sections of the new [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#). Whilst the Quality Code is no longer a regulatory requirement, it contains the distillation of sector expected and best practice; internal policy and process reviews benefit from reflection on our adherence to the Code.
6. The OfS continues to publish case reports and regulatory outcomes of its assessment activities. These are reviewed by Taught Programmes Subcommittee to consider any findings of relevance or lessons to be learned for Newcastle. There has been a particular focus on [sub-contractual](#) arrangements (previously 'franchise' or 'validation') due to its exponential growth at some providers and concerns about low quality provision and student loan fraud. Whilst this is a very limited part of Newcastle's offering, as partnerships in areas like online provision grow we must be mindful of the lessons learned in this area.
7. On 18 September 2025 the OfS published its [Consultation on the future approach to quality regulation](#). The proposals aim to integrate their assessment activity with the Teaching Excellence Framework to create an integrated quality model. This represents a substantial change in approach, moving to a rolling cycle of assessment, and introduces potential new consequences for tuition fees and student numbers for institutions receiving a Bronze or Requirements Improvement judgement.

Professional and statutory body review

8. A substantial proportion of the University's programmes are also accredited/recognised by Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs). These undertake monitoring and review of the programmes that they accredit/recognise on different cycles and utilising different methodologies. During the 2024-25 academic year, there were reaccreditation exercises with 17 accrediting bodies covering 129 programmes (including variants), all with a successful outcome.

Education in partnership

9. The B conditions apply to all our provision, including our wide range of educational partnerships.
10. During 2024-25 the University continued to operate its policies and processes for educational partnerships, which are aligned to the expectations of the *UK Quality Code*. In the last academic year four new partnerships were approved, new programmes were added to an existing partnership, and three educational partnerships were renewed. Academic units have also reviewed educational partnership provision within their AMRs, subject to oversight by FECs and TPSC.

Condition B1 Curriculum and pedagogy

B1: The provider must ensure that the students registered on each higher education course receive a high quality academic experience.

A high quality academic experience includes but is not limited to ensuring that each higher education course:

- a. is up-to-date;
- b. provides educational challenge;
- c. is coherent;
- d. is effectively delivered; and
- e. requires students to develop relevant skills

Programme design – taught programmes

11. The University's degree programmes are subject to institutional programme approval processes. The approach taken is risk-based, with more complex programmes requiring approval at institutional level while less complex proposals are approved at faculty level and reported to University level. All new proposed programmes must demonstrate alignment with national requirements for academic quality and standards, the process includes involvement of an independent external subject specialist to ensure that this is the case, and a set of internal expectations which align with the requirements of B1. A similar risk-based approach operates for changes to existing programmes.
12. For all these activities, regular reports on approvals (whether at faculty or University level) are received by UEC. Table 2 shows this activity for the last five years:

Table 2: Programme approvals, withdrawals and suspensions, 2020-21 to 2024-25

	2020- 21	2021- 22	2022- 23	2023- 24	2024- 25
New programmes	24	12	48	69	126
Major changes	45	35	58	138	42
Programme withdrawals	61	186	69	208	147
Programme suspensions	72	90	63	56	39

Programme design – research programmes

13. The University's *Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes*, along with relevant regulations set out the standards expected in relation to research degrees. Research degrees are 'designed' on an individual basis to meet the interests of the student, in some cases aligned with a specific research project or group, with the expectations and requirements of the degree set out in individual Learning Agreements and through a Training Needs Analysis, with support and guidance provided by the supervisory team.

Monitoring and review

14. To ensure that all programmes continue to meet University expectations they undergo Annual Monitoring and Review (AMR). This is the process by which the academic quality and standards of all taught programmes are subject to ongoing oversight at academic unit, faculty and institutional levels:
 - Boards of studies review a wide range of qualitative and quantitative data for the programmes under their remit and write a report highlighting key strengths and weaknesses identified by this review and the actions that are being taken to address any issues and enhance the programmes.
 - Faculties review all board of studies AMR reports, to ensure that the board of studies review has been conducted effectively, issues addressed appropriately, and identify any generic or thematic issues arising from AMR reports.
 - Faculty overview reports of AMR are submitted to TPSC and UEC, whose role is to confirm for the University that AMR has been conducted effectively and ensure that issues of institution-wide concern are considered.
15. During 2024-25 FECs, TPSC and UEC considered AMR reports from boards of studies, analysing and reporting on the delivery of taught programmes during 2023-24. Faculties confirmed to TPSC that AMR had been conducted effectively, as well as identifying overarching thematic issues arising from AMR reports.
16. Research degree programmes were also subject to annual review through the University's Quality Assurance and Enhancement Framework (QAEF) process, which operates in all academic units. This process was monitored by Faculty Postgraduate Research Committees, and both Postgraduate Research Sub-Committee and UEC confirmed that the annual review of research degree programmes had been conducted effectively. Recommendations for Academic Unit, Faculty and University consideration were identified, however, no significant strategy or policy issues emerged from the process.
17. The University conducts periodic reviews of its taught programmes through the Learning and Teaching Review (LTR) process which all subject areas undergo. The purpose of LTR is to ensure that the provision under review meets national and University expectations for academic quality and standards, leading to a decision on whether to reapprove the programmes under review. The process also serves as critical friend to promote enhancement and development of the provision under review.
18. At its 16 June 2024 meeting University Education Committee approved the suspension of the Learning and Teaching Review policy with effect from the 2024-25 academic year onwards, in light of the significant transformation of programmes planned as part development of the Leading Edge Curriculum nearly complete, a new approach to periodic/programme review will be developed as part of implementation.
19. The periodic review of research degree programmes is normally undertaken as part of the QAEF process through review visits to academic units that normally take place between April and July.. Two academic units from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences were visited during the 2024/25 academic year, reflecting on the 2023/24 academic year. The 2024/25 scheduled review visits for the Faculty of Medical Sciences and the Faculty of Science, Agriculture and Environment did not take place and the respective Deans of Postgraduate Research agreed that these could instead take place in the 2025/26 academic year.

Condition B2 Support for learning and engagement

B2: The provider must take all reasonable steps to ensure:

- a. each cohort of students registered on each higher education course receives resources and support which are sufficient for the purpose of ensuring:
 - i. a high quality academic experience for those students; and

<p>ii. those students succeed in and beyond higher education; and</p> <p>b. effective engagement with each cohort of students which is sufficient for the purpose of ensuring:</p> <p>i. a high quality academic experience for those students; and</p> <p>those students succeed in and beyond higher education.</p>

20. B2 covers all aspects of the wider student academic experience covering

- Induction
- Academic development and skills support
- Support for avoiding academic misconduct
- Ensuring that staff are appropriately qualified and there are sufficient staff
- Physical and digital learning resources
- Careers support

21. This covers a wide range of services, policies and areas of provision which cannot be subject to the same standardised quality assurance process as are individual programmes. Oversight of all of these areas falls under University Education Committee and its subcommittees. Through regular reporting and review of areas of service, policy and provision, as well as the service level priority setting processes and internal review the University maintains comprehensive oversight of these aspects of the quality of the academic experience.

22. B2 also covers mechanisms for student engagement, representation and feedback. The University has in place:

- a comprehensive student representation system, operating at academic unit, faculty and institutional levels.
- extensive use of student surveys, both external (for example NSS, PTES, PRES) and internal (Newcastle Experience Survey). The outputs of which are reviewed at programme, unit, Faculty and University level.
- student involvement in core quality management processes: through consultation with students as part of programme approval; consideration of feedback from students within the Annual Monitoring and Review process; sharing external examiner reports and boards of studies responses with students; and including student members on review teams for periodic reviews.
- Student involvement in governance including representation on UEC and its subcommittees, students playing a key role in FECs including student-run meetings across the academic year.

Condition B3 Student outcomes

B3 The provider must deliver positive outcomes for students on its higher education courses.
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23. The revised B3 condition also set baseline thresholds for provider performance in student continuation and completion, degree outcomes and graduate employment. The University exceeds the threshold requirements in all but a few specific data splits involving small cohorts, due to the late publication of these data it will be considered in detail by UEC in November 2025 and any appropriate action taken. Full data for the University is available via the OfS [Student Outcomes Dashboard](#).

Condition B4 Assessment and awards and B5 Standards

<p>B4 The provider must ensure that:</p> <p>a. students are assessed effectively;</p>

- b. each assessment is valid and reliable;
- c. academic regulations are designed to ensure that relevant awards are credible;
- d. academic regulations are designed to ensure effective assessment of technical proficiency in the English language in a manner that appropriately reflects the level and content of the course; and
- e. relevant awards granted to students are credible at the point of being granted and when compared to those granted previously.

B5 The provider must ensure that, in respect of any relevant awards granted to students who complete a higher education course provided by, or on behalf of, the provider (whether or not the provider is the awarding body):

- a. any standards set appropriately reflect any applicable sector-recognised standards;
- b. awards are only granted to students whose knowledge and skills appropriately reflect any applicable sector-recognised standards.

24. Programme design, monitoring and review processes (see condition B1 above) all include consideration of how students are assessed and the effective operation of assessment processes. The University's *University Framework for Assessment Design in Taught Programmes and Policy on Assessment and Feedback* set out the expectations that all programmes are expected to meet to ensure effective, valid and reliable assessment. Students are also entitled to regular and comprehensive feedback on their assessed work to help improve their future performance. All internal examiners and Boards of Examiners operate marking and moderation in line with the *Policy and Guidance on Moderation and Scaling*.
25. The primary monitoring of degree outcomes is via individual Boards of Examiners with University oversight undertaken by TPSC and UEC. Exam boards apply University regulations and operate in line with additional guidance to ensure consistency of decision making across the University and between cohorts. The University also has established procedures for the identification of academic misconduct and appropriate consequences for students who are found to have breached University regulations.

External Examining

26. A cornerstone of the University's approach to ensuring the academic standards of its awards is its external examiner system. All taught programmes leading to a Newcastle award are overseen by one or more external examiners. All external examiners are required to look at samples of assessed work on the programmes for which they are responsible, and to confirm in writing whether the awards made are consistent with the national standards set out in the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ). They are also required to confirm that standards are consistent with similar programmes at comparable universities.
27. External examiner reports are considered and responded to by the relevant academic unit, with oversight by the Faculty Education Committee (FEC), with Faculty reporting on to Taught Programmes Sub-Committee (TPSC). Almost all external examiners reports relating to 2024-25 provision have been received for undergraduate provision (10 reports outstanding). Reports for taught postgraduate programmes are still being received (with a deadline of 30 November). All reports received to date have confirmed that academic standards of the programmes reviewed by external examiners meet national threshold standards and are comparable with standards at other universities. At the start of one Board of Examiners, two externals did not agree with the emergency regulations put in place, and felt they did not have the necessary confidence in the marking, moderation, and degree classification procedures that would allow them to fulfil their role. This incident is being followed up by the PVC (Education).
28. External examining is also central to maintaining the academic standards of research degrees, with all research degree examinations including at least one appropriately qualified external examiner in the examination team. All examinations conducted in 2024-25 met this requirement.