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### Responsible QA – committing to impact

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### Paper proposal form

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*Please note that all fields are obligatory. For a detailed description of the submission requirements and Frequently Asked Questions please consult the Call for Contributions.*

#### Author(s)

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**Short bio (150 words max):**

Professor McIntyre-Bhatty joined Bournemouth University (BU) in 2011 and has held senior positions in universities for over a decade. He leads the annual strategic planning processes and his portfolio includes responsibility for the Faculties and BU International College alongside academic quality, academic services and admissions, programme management, strategic risk and business intelligence. He is Chair of the University Academic Standards and Education & Student Experience Committees.

He is a member of the Board of the Quality Assurance Agency and also serves on the Advisory Committee for Degree Awarding Powers. He was regional associate editor for Chinese Management Studies for a 4 year period, and has previously been closely engaged in research concerning the match of graduate skills and employer needs in regional labour markets. His track record extends to successful collaborations at both national and international levels with partners across Europe and in Singapore, Malaysia and Hong Kong.

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**Short bio (150 words max):**

Jacky has held a variety of roles at Bournemouth University and has 20 years' experience in higher education across academic and professional services senior management roles. She has been Head of Academic Services since 2013 and her current areas of responsibility include Library and Learning



Support, Student Administration, UK Admissions and Academic Quality (including partnership provision).

As a Senior Lecturer in the Business School, she led the part-time Business Studies programme for over 6 years, including its development as one of the first fully online Foundation Degrees in the UK. Her previous areas of responsibility at BU have included partnership provision and fair access, and she is passionate about quality assurance to drive student enhancement. She has been a QAA Reviewer since 2011. She is Chair of the University's newly formed 'Access, Excellence and Impact Committee', which integrates related activity on fair access, and student education enhancement.

## **Proposal**

**Title: Annual Programme Monitoring and Enhancement Review using a Data Dashboard**

### **Abstract (150 words max):**

This paper describes the outcomes of a review of practice and related policy and procedures for annual programme monitoring. The review of practice highlighted that there was an artificial separation between action plans from annual programme monitoring and other actions related to enhancement of the student experience, so there was potential for overlap. The process had become overly bureaucratic and time consuming. Existing processes required a comprehensive review of qualitative and quantitative monitoring data but did not provide guidance on analysis and interpretation of programme performance against the quantitative data, and there were no targets or thresholds set around the review of the quantitative data. A new model has been developed based on a more focused review against a data dashboard. The new model integrates previously separate processes and facilitates a holistic review leading to impact orientated action plans which are developed at programme level and build up to institutional level.

**The paper is based on:** Practice

**Has this paper previously been published/presented elsewhere? If yes, give details.** No

**Text of paper (3000 words max):**

### **1.0 REVIEW OF EXISTING PRACTICE**

The quality assurance framework nationally is changing and over recent years there has been an ever increasing emphasis on the effective use of data to evidence impact and outcomes, (Taylor, 2014). In this context, Bournemouth University (BU) has used this as an opportunity to reconsider existing annual programme monitoring processes and practices and the extent to which they support current and evolving future needs.

The existing annual monitoring policy and procedure 'Continuous Monitoring of Taught Academic Provision', was reviewed with the aim of achieving a more holistic approach whereby quality and enhancement monitoring, review and action planning were fully integrated, based on clearly defined and agreed thresholds and targets, and focused on impact and outcomes. Annual monitoring outcomes should be more focused and succinct, and the impact of action taken to enhance the student experience should be more easily evaluated and measured. There was also a desire to streamline and simplify processes and reduce bureaucracy. These aims were in accordance with Chapter 8 of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education published by The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) which states that '*...regular evaluation of processes for programme monitoring and review ensures that the processes remain fit for purpose and are not unnecessarily burdensome, and that their outcomes continue to contribute to the enhancement of student learning opportunities*'.



The review also considered the underlying policy principles and whether they remained valid. These were; to ensure academic programmes remained current and valid, that standards are maintained, that the quality of learning opportunities is appropriate and to enhance the student experience of teaching, learning and assessment to identify and address any weakness in provision.

## **2.0 REVIEW FINDINGS**

A review of the existing policy and procedure was undertaken at BU early in 2017 which looked at the outcomes from the existing process, and other related review activity, for example, annual National Student Survey (NSS) results. It was identified that an artificial separation between outcomes from annual programme quality assurance and enhancement monitoring and other actions related to enhancement of the student experience existed. This was due to the underlying processes being separate and carried out at slightly different times leading to multiple action plans with potentially overlapping actions. University level review of the outcomes and action plans from annual programme monitoring took place towards the end of the Autumn term, whereas other 'student experience' action plans incorporating actions from a review of NSS data were captured at the beginning of the term.

Annual programme monitoring processes required programme teams to undertake a comprehensive review of a large amount of qualitative and quantitative information and reports, leading to the development of a continuous action plan. However, there was no guidance on analysis and interpretation of programme performance against the quantitative data, and there were no specific targets or thresholds set around the review of this data. There was also no explicit link to BU Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

As actions were not defined with reference to quantitative targets, monitoring and evaluating progress against actions could be difficult, and measuring the impact of action taken on key data measures was challenging. The lack of specific targets or thresholds also meant it was possible for programme teams to inadvertently fail to address key aspects in the monitoring data requiring action, or for actions not to be targeted enough to bring about the required level of improvement in performance. There was no differentiation between high and lower performing programmes in relation to the monitoring requirements.

It was found during the review that the level of bureaucracy associated with the existing process had increased, both in relation to the monitoring data, and the related action plans and summary reports, and staff found the review of monitoring data very time-consuming. There was also variation in the quality of the continuous action plans developed at programme level. Mandatory summary reports compiled at faculty level, the 'Faculty Quality Report', were considered and approved by the University's Academic Standards Committee. These reports had grown substantially and were averaging almost 50 pages in length. Whilst these summary reports followed a standard template, due to the lack of specifying monitoring data targets and thresholds in the existing processes, these lengthy reports often focused on different aspects or analysed data in different ways which made it challenging to easily identify common emerging institutional issues or themes.

The outcome of the review was that a more holistic approach was needed which would remove any potential duplication of review activity and action planning and ensure that annual quality and enhancement monitoring, review and action plans were fully integrated, based on clearly defined and agreed thresholds and targets, and focused on impact and outcomes. The process should be more streamlined and efficient, and outcomes should be available earlier than previously; towards the beginning of the Autumn term rather than the end. The result should be a stronger focus on action to demonstrate impact, greater consistency, more transparency, clearer responsibility and accountability and greater enhancement of the student experience.



## 3.0 REVISED PROCESS

### 3.1 Principles

The principles of the annual programme monitoring and enhancement review were re-defined, building on the previous policy. A core requirement is that the reviewed process continues to provide assurance and oversight at an institutional and faculty level that quality and academic standards are managed and maintained appropriately. The process provides a mechanism for reflection on performance against agreed data to identify areas of focus and priority, to identify strengths and good practice for wider dissemination, and to facilitate enhancement of the student academic experience and outcomes. It enables programmes and departments to focus on areas where performance is not at the required level and to target prompt actions as required. Action plans will be proportional and timely to facilitate a prompt response to monitoring data, and regular review of actions in-year tracks progress against targets. The process also facilitates the impact of action taken to be monitored against data at department, faculty and institutional-level. The revised process underpins and supports other University processes relating to monitoring, review and enhancement of taught provision and the student experience.

### 3.2 Transparency

Following the review, proposals were developed to move to a model for annual programme monitoring with a stronger data focus, facilitated through the development of a new Programme Dashboard which would build on existing University KPIs where defined, cascading these to programme level and identifying new targets where required.

The Annual Monitoring and Enhancement Review or 'AMER' is based on a holistic review of the programme performance against defined data in the Programme Dashboard. The review of the data leads to the development of action plans at programme, department and faculty level.

The Programme Dashboard incorporates an agreed set of core metrics linked to University KPIs and sector benchmarking where appropriate. The core metrics are:

- Student feedback (National Student Survey data)
- Unit evaluation (pass rates, standard deviation, mean, median)
- Progression and retention (at each academic level)
- Programme outcomes (internally calculated 'value-add' measure)
- External examining (comparability of academic standards and student performance)
- Employability outcomes (Destination of Leavers from Higher Education Survey (DLHE) programme level data).

The core metrics are agreed annually by the University Academic Standards Committee (ASC) and the Dashboard is sufficiently flexible to include additional metrics which can vary on a periodic basis based on changing sector and/or institutional priorities as agreed annually by ASC. This ensures that the data review remains valid and relevant. All data on the dashboard are rated against agreed thresholds or targets to give programme teams a clear visual representative of the overall performance of their programme. Programme teams develop an action plan based on their detailed review of the Dashboard data, and it is clear which areas require action.

A key difference in the new approach is that action plans are proportional to the performance of the programme, and as such, high performing programmes may focus primarily on highlighting innovation and successful interventions as well as overall strengths and features of good practice. Lower performing programmes or departments are required to identify specific targeted actions to address issues, and are expected to engage with the University's Centre of Excellence in Learning to identify a programme of targeted support as appropriate. Gibbs (2012) acknowledges that this form of quality enhancement risk-based review driven by data is becoming more common in the sector.



### **3.2 Responsibility and Accountability**

Senior management buy-in for the new process was obtained early in the review, with key findings shared with Executive Deans and Deputy Deans Education and Professional Practice who were very supportive of the new approach. Prior to the policy and procedural changes being formally approved, Deputy Deans provided an update to academic staff in their faculty, setting out the rationale for the changes and the benefits of the new model.

Faculty Heads of Department have a key role and specific responsibility for overseeing the new process in their department, and disseminating the Dashboard to programme teams, working with teams to support the development of action plans and formally approving Programme Action Plans. Heads of Department will also develop a concise Faculty Summary and Action Plan. This bottom-up approach to action planning ensures clear ownership and accountability at each stage and ensures that cross-department issues are identified by the Head of Department based on their systematic review of all Programme Action Plans.

The Deputy Dean Education and Professional Practice has a key role and specific responsibility for overseeing the process at faculty level, and their review remains a core requirement as in the former process. However, the 50 page Faculty Quality Report has been replaced by a succinct Faculty Summary and Action Plan. The Faculty Summary is a concise (2 page) narrative that identifies cross-departmental issues and themes and allows for the identification of faculty-level actions which may emerge from the review of data at this level.

The central Academic Quality team in Academic Services are responsible for managing the process overall and for preparing an overview of outcomes for ASC providing an institutional-level summary report identifying overarching themes and trends across Faculties. Institutional-level actions may be drawn from this report.

## **4.0 IMPLEMENTATION**

It was agreed that to realise the benefits of the new approach as soon as possible, it should apply to the current monitoring cycle (2016/17). In August 2017, the Heads of Department will have access to the Programme Dashboard. This will be provided alongside operational guidance and templates for the action plans developed by the Academic Quality team. Faculties have had opportunities to contribute to the development of the action plan templates, and to the presentation of the Programme Dashboard. Drop-in advice and guidance sessions managed by the Academic Quality team will be offered to Heads of Department and Programme Leaders after the Programme Dashboard has been provided.

The timing of the data review and development of action plans is fundamental to delivering an accurate and relevant summary to the various relevant committees at BU. The timeline for launch has been designed to ensure that data is considered in a prompt and timely manner, that action is taken immediately if issues are identified and also aligns with external reporting requirements.

## **5.0 MONITORING, EVALUATION AND IMPACT**

This more data-driven approach brings greater focus and clarity of purpose to annual monitoring, reduces the administrative burden on programme teams and senior management, reduces the potential for duplication and ensures that University and faculty targets are explicitly aligned to each other. The overview report prepared by the Academic Quality team will both provide assurance to the University that the process is operating effectively and meeting the policy principles but will also facilitate a stronger focus on institutional level themes, issues and actions.



Programme teams, Heads of Department and Deputy Deans Education will be monitoring progress against action plans throughout the year with a formal mid-year progress review at the Faculty Academic Standards Committee.

The Academic Quality team will undertake a review of the effectiveness of the new process in Autumn 2017 following the conclusion of the first cycle which will provide opportunities for all key stakeholders to feedback on their experience. The review will be published and considered by the ASC at the end of the Autumn term and will inform any revisions to the model for the next cycle. The review will include analysis of the following aspects:

- Completion of the process according to the timeline set, and extent to which deadlines were met;
- Level of engagement of all stakeholders;
- Feedback on the programme dashboard including accessibility and ease of use to facilitate identification of actions;
- Effectiveness and appropriateness of the action plan and summary templates;
- Stakeholder feedback on the process as a whole and extent to which it has achieved its aims.

Gibbs (2012, p.20) highlights the role of departmental leadership in quality enhancement initiatives and their role in the development of a 'community of practice'. The extent to which Heads of Department fully engage and are strong supporters and advocates of the new model will also be a key measure.

In relation to the effectiveness of the new process in improving the student experience, in the 2017/18 cycle, the impact of actions taken will be evaluated quantitatively against each metric on the Programme Dashboard to provide a programme view of progress after one year. This may also be represented on the Dashboard using trend indicators. This will be aggregated to department and faculty level. It is anticipated that further learning will be forthcoming in relation to the nature of actions taken and the approaches which have had the most positive impact on the student experience, including the impact of institutional support provided to programme teams. This will form part of the annual reporting to ASC in the 2017/18 cycle and ongoing refinement of the Annual Monitoring and Enhancement Review process.

#### **References:**

QAA (2015) *The UK Quality Code for Higher Education*. Gloucester: Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education.

Taylor, J. (2014) *Informing or Distracting? Guiding or Driving? The Use of Performance Indicators in Higher Education*. In: Eliophotou Menon M., Geronimo Terkla, D., & Gibbs, P. (Eds.) *Using Data to Improve Higher Education Research, Policy and Practice*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

Gibbs, G. (2010) *Dimensions of Quality*. York: The Higher Education Academy.

Gibbs, G. (2012) *Implications of 'Dimensions of quality' in a market environment*. York: The Higher Education Academy.

#### **Discussion questions:**

- Gibbs (2010) suggests that data drives institutional behaviour – what might be the implications on other qualitative measures of this approach focused on a core set of quantitative data?
- What role should students have in this new data-driven model? How should the outcomes of annual monitoring be communicated and shared with students?

*Please submit your proposal by sending this form, in Word format, by 24 July 2017 to [QAForum@eua.be](mailto:QAForum@eua.be). The file should be named using the last names of the authors, e.g. Smith\_Jones.doc. Please do not send a hard copy or a PDF file.*