Quality Assurance Report to Board of Trustees:
for the 2020/21 Academic Year

1. Introduction

1.1 The University's Quality Framework should enable the effective and efficient monitoring of academic standards and the quality of the student experience in relation to internal imperatives and external requirement, principally conditions B from the Office for Students requirements for registration. For 20/21 it has operated in a broadly similar manner to that outlined in the 19/20 report (see Figure 1 in the Appendix for reference). Education action plans (EAPs) capture the planned activity of Schools over the year and are developed following review of a range of inputs (e.g. student feedback, annual programme review, external examiner reports, strategic initiatives, etc). University Quality Team (UQT) visits allow discussion of key topics with school staff thus ensuring oversight of all educational provision across the institution and providing confidence we are meeting continued Office for Students (OfS) registration requirements.

Feedback from the 19/20 cycle on the framework was largely positive but some operational changes were made following stakeholder feedback, namely detailed guidance on completing the EAP, minor revisions to the EAP template and support for departmental level EAPs where helpful. One addition to the quality framework in 20/21 was the establishment of Taskforces in response to the results of the 2020 National Student Survey (NSS). These are covered further below (sections 2.1 and 2.6).

1.2 The institution has continued to face challenges in its education provision through 20/21, most notably in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. A set of guiding principles were established at the outset of the academic year to underpin the blended approach to education that was necessary in light of scientific advice and government guidance. This blended approach allowed students who could not attend in person to access their curriculum online, subject to accreditation requirements and/or specific intended learning outcomes. Assessment was planned to be online, based on lessons learned from 19/20. Proctoring was adopted only where external accreditation made this necessary. A further national lockdown in January 2021 required most programmes to pivot at short notice to online delivery of teaching and assessment. A small number of prioritised programmes were permitted to offer in-person teaching from mid-April to ensure learning outcomes were delivered. However, the national restrictions meant that no further in-person teaching was offered for most programmes.

It is important to highlight the pandemic has brought additional challenges to us outside of its immediate public health implications for delivery of education. Staff workloads were significantly impacted by the rapid pivot to online in 19/20 and this has continued into 20/21 with both academic and professional service staff having limited time to recharge over the summer months and prepare for the 20/21 academic year. It is important to note that this also applies to staff across the central services who provide essential roles for student support and delivery of educational systems and processes. Impacts on students must be considered too. We now have had two years of intake where students have joined us following a disrupted secondary education. This will have affected their level of preparation for higher education, for example familiarity with sitting exams or preparing for high stakes assessments. The cumulative impacts of such issues are considerable and likely to be with us for some time.

1.3 This report outlines the operation of our quality framework during 20/21, highlighting key outcomes and plans for the future.

2. Quality Activity in 20/21

2.1 *Overview:* All education provision was reviewed for quality assurance purposes during the 20/21 academic year. At the outset of the academic year discussion with Faculties was undertaken to decide upon areas for Periodic Programme Revalidation (PPR) for 20/21. There were four (Law, Electrical and Electronic Engineering, Mathematics and Film, TV and Theatre) postponed from 19/20 due to the pandemic's impact on workload and also areas within Engineering that were scheduled to have Professional Statutory Regulatory Bodies (PSRB) visits in 20/21 for external accreditation that would normally be linked to our internal PPR process. Due to ongoing concerns over workloads of school staff and changes to accreditation visits these discussions resulted in the conversion of all planned PPRs to either UQT visits or an NSS Taskforce. This resulted in a total of **46** University Quality Team (UQT) reviews in 20/21, together with the establishment of NSS Taskforces in Economics, English, History, History of Art, Politics and Psychology.

2.2 *The use of Student Quality Reviewers (SQR's):* The university remains innovative in how close and involved students are in our quality review process. On all UQT panels, one of the three members is an SQR. In 20/21 there has been a total of 19 students in this position, each averaging around 3 reviews each over the year. These dedicated students provide invaluable input into the panels and often lead to meeting with the school staff having a more constructive dynamic. The primary responsibility of these SQR's is to meet with the elected student academic representatives of each school, department and course. In these meetings, the SQR's can gain new perspectives on the topics they identified from the variety of documents the panel reviews. This insight allows both the SQR and the panel to better prioritise and word their lines of inquires when they meet with the schools. Generally, school staff appreciate the inclusion of SQR's in the review meetings as they can provide a sounding board for the comments and ideas staff provide in response to the panel's questions. One of the biggest challenges SQR's face is in motivating the course representatives to participate in the process. This is not a new problem, however the SQR's noted that in 20/21 the participation rates did increase. This was likely due to the move to online meetings which allowed meetings to fit into student schedules more easily. This has resulted in reviews for 20/21 having a more representative student input aiding the panel's suggestions, which was crucial with the large shift in teaching style observed.

2.3 *Use of School Education Action Plans (EAP)*: The school education action plan (EAP) is a central element of the quality framework and is where education teams record both strategic and key operational actions arising from all elements of the quality framework. Separate plans are generated for taught and research provision due to their different student journeys and governance. EAPs should be used as 'live' documents where progress against actions is updated at regular periods through the academic year. During the 20/21 academic year just under **700 actions** were added to EAPs across the Institution (specifically 507 taught and 172 research). The most common actions on taught EAPs were in relation to either **teaching** (27%) or **assessment and feedback** (23%), with support (academic or student) and student voice/engagement contributing 14% each to actions. The remaining actions (22%) covered a range of actions including preparation for employment, learning environment, community building and skills training. The most common actions on research degree EAPs were in relation to **student support** (35%) with student engagement (18%) and skills training (12%) being other common categories.

2.4 *UQT Outcomes:* The outcome of a UQT review continues to be a concise report provided to the school normally within a week of the review, highlighting areas for commendations together with specific recommendations to the school, faculty or university role-holder, division or committee. The common themes/outcomes arising from the entire set of reviews were referred to the University Learning and Teaching Committee (taught programmes) or the University PGR Committee (research degree provision) for consideration and action, where appropriate. A common theme present in all UQT reviews (taught and postgraduate research) was how, despite the challenge presented, our response to COVID-19 had resulted in the development of practices that were impacting positively on student's educational experience. This was often linked to how online platforms were expanding opportunities, such as discussion with research supervisors, flipped classroom approaches, engagement with personal tutoring sessions, placement supervision, access to more online resources for skills training and a broader spectrum of external experts to give talks, lectures or examine at the doctorate level. The building of communities was a second theme that featured in reviews of both taught and research provision and highlighted how staff were needing to think creatively to facilitate this important feature of university life. Assessment and feedback was a common theme in reports from review of taught provision, reflecting our continued focus as an institution to improve student satisfaction in this area. An additional topic commonly raised in research degree reviews was the diversity of student experience depending upon how individuals were funded and concerns this presented in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion. UQT review panels will, in the 2021/22 cycle, check on the progress of the recommendations in its previous report to ensure action and monitor impact of improvements. The University-level actions arising from the reports are recorded and progress against them monitored by UAQSC.

2.5 *Periodic Programme Review (PPR):* As outlined previously (see 2.1) no PPRs were started in 20/21 but outstanding actions from 19/20 were followed up. The School of Physics are continuing to engage with the curriculum enhancement programme to revise the content and structure of their undergraduate programmes. This work has been impacted by the pandemic affecting staff workloads but progress is continuing to be made regarding curriculum change. UAQSC received two reports (October 2020 and April 2021) from the Department of Anthropology and Archaeology providing updates on continuing PPR recommendations. The included completion of actions following engagement with TESTA and actions to improve the consistency of marking. Review of the structure and content of the BA Archaeology and Anthropology resulted in amendments being made to archaeology options to increase their appeal. Market analysis indicated that a name change would not be helpful to recruitment but some changes to prospectus to highlight employability

skills would be beneficial. This completed all outstanding actions from the PPR and no further reports would be necessary. UAQSC received a report (January 2021) from the Department of History illustrating that they had either completed or made good progress with all outstanding actions from the PPR and hence all programmes were revalidated. All PPR actions and follow-ups from 19/20 are now complete with programmes revalidated.

2.6 *NSS Taskforces:* In response to the results of the 2021 National Student Survey (NSS) the University's senior team established a series of Taskforces to support seven specific areas where particular concerns were identified, i.e., Economics, English, History, History of Art, Law, Politics and Psychology. Early in the academic year the Law School requested to engage with the Curriculum Enhancement Project by means of a curriculum festival and hence it was felt unnecessary to also continue with the taskforce, considering staff workload concerns at the time. The remaining six taskforces were led by Associate PVCs (Quality and Standards) or (Learning and Teaching) with the Academic Quality and Policy Office (AQPO) providing professional service support. A series of focussed meetings (up to five) were held with each area during Teaching Block 1 and the initial part of Teaching Block 2 to discuss issues and identify potential actions. It is difficult to accurately determine the impact of these taskforces as each school had a range of additional complexities and challenges together with varying levels of engagement with the process, but there was clear improvement in NSS results in 2021 for both History of Art and Psychology. The taskforces were stopped during Teaching Block 2 when the pandemic situation resulted in further lockdown restrictions impacting staff workloads.

2.7 *Summary of Professional and Statuary Regulatory Bodies (PSRB) visits:* Across five of our six Faculties, **34** accrediting bodies act to provide professional accreditation to **196** programmes (see Table 1 in Appendix for further detail). Such accreditation has brought additional yet varied challenges for programmes in the context of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. 145 of these accredited programmes are undergraduate, 50 are taught postgraduate and 1 is a postgraduate research programme. In total 46% of our taught students (53% of all UGs and 17% of all PGTs) are on accredited programmes. In 2020/21 several planned accreditation visits were postponed because of the COVID situation. One school (Department of Electrical and Electronic Engineering) underwent a visit which successfully accredited 3 undergraduate programmes. One school (School of Management) underwent a desk-based review which successfully accredited 9 of its undergraduate programmes. 52 programmes were successfully reaccredited through an annual desk-based confirmation process.

2.8 *External Examiner Reports:* 137 undergraduate (UG) external reports were received for the 20/21 academic year, with no extraordinary reports (where an external examiner has serious concerns that cannot be resolved within the School and are drawn to the attention of the Associate PVC) submitted. Postgraduate taught (PGT) reports and responses are due in January 2022 and so are not available at the time of writing. However, by way of update for the 2019/20 year, 134 PGT external reports were submitted, with no extraordinary reports received. Actions resulting from recommendations within externals' reports are captured in school's Education Action Plans, and hence reviewed via the UQT review process. In addition, UAQSC monitors common themes arising from external examiner reports and University-level actions in response. A number of positive comments were received in reports from 20/21 about the way in which the schools and the university responded to the Covid-19 pandemic. Generally, external examiners felt that rigorous and thoughtful processes had been put in place to address the impact of Covid-19, with a focus throughout on fairness and student wellbeing. For example:

> *"I commend the Bristol academic and professional services staff for their superb work in a particularly challenging academic year." (Dove – Law)*

> *"Changes in teaching, assessment, regulations, and processes in response to Covid-19 seemed to be very carefully done taking a student-centred approach." (Ferre – Psychology)*

The most common themes across reports were plagiarism, commented on in 5% of reports (7 of 137), and feedback provided to students, commented on in 12% (17 of 137). UAQSC considered the concerns expressed by some external examiners relating to academic integrity and in response introduced a policy and process for proctoring online assessment where there is both a good pedagogical rationale and PSRB requirements, due to the technical complexity and privacy concerns such arrangements bring. Proposals to develop a university wide training course in relation to academic integrity have also been discussed and are being taken forward in 21/22. Similarly, concerns around the quality of feedback provided to students have been considered by the relevant schools and faculties with a range of resultant actions, for example the

Faculty of Arts have introduced for 21/22 a new 'Feedback Baseline' providing additional guidance on written feedback for their staff.

External examiners play a critical role in the consideration of award for all postgraduate research (PGR) degrees, with just over 600 PGR candidates being considered by Research Degrees Examination Board in 20/21. This is fewer than the previous year (744) and reflects the impact of the pandemic on requests for extensions to study periods rather than an impact on the examination process itself. Indeed, online vivas continued in 20/21 to minimise disruptions from public mixing restrictions. The proportion of the types of outcomes (i.e. unconditional award, minor errors, errors of substance etc) followed a similar pattern to previous years.

2.9 *Educational partnerships:* The University continues to maintain a wide-ranging portfolio of collaborative educational activity in 20/21. Bristol has been particularly successful in winning funding bids for Doctoral Training Centres (DTCs) which are usually delivered collaboratively with other HEIs, research centres and industry. A number of successful bids were announced in 2019 and work was undertaken during 20/21 to put appropriate contract agreements in place. In addition to the cohort-based opportunities provided by DTCs, the University has expanded its postgraduate research educational partnership portfolio by partnering with a number of international institutions (e.g. DUKE Medical School in Singapore and the African Population and Health Research Centre in Kenya) to provide students with split-site or distance learning programmes. These often capitalise on existing research networks between staff at both parties. Several new Dual Award (Cotutelle) PhDs were established, including with the University of Neuchatel in Switzerland and the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology in Australia. In terms of taught provision, the University continues to collaborate with a range of HEIs, industry and clinical partners to deliver 'taught' units and work-based learning to students. Again, activities spanned a wide range of educational offerings including clinical teaching for students in the health sciences, to year in industry activities coordinated by schools to industrial mentoring and tutoring for students in Engineering subjects. A project to simplify and streamline the governance, policy and processes for approving educational partnership proposals was started in 20/21 and has since been completed in 21/22.

2.9 *Summary of appeals and complaints:* The adjustments to university life, that have been a necessary response to the ongoing pandemic, have resulted in a continued increase in the number of formal student complaints raised during the 20/21 academic year. There has also been a significant increase in the number of academic appeals arising from the summer and re-sit assessments. As for previous years a report discussing the granularity of both appeals and complaints is being prepared by the Secretary's Office and will be submitted to the Board of Trustees for review subsequently. A pilot for centralised appeals ran from the beginning of July 2021, to cover both the summer and the resit assessment periods. The purpose of the pilot was to remove the transactional workload from Faculties, so resources could be focussed upon decision-making rather than processing, with the overall aim of improving the student experience. A review of the pilot has been carried out and will be presented for information to University Academic Quality and Standards Committee in March 2022.

2.10 *Programme Changes:* **18** new programmes were approved during 2020/21. 10 were taught postgraduate programmes and 8 were new undergraduate programmes, 8 of which were approved at Faculty level under the low-risk approval framework. During 2020/21, 13 programme withdrawals were approved. Of these 6 were undergraduate, and 6 were taught postgraduate and 1 was a pre-sessional non-degree. Six of the withdrawn programmes were replaced with new programme titles: 5 undergraduate programmes and 1 taught postgraduate programme were renamed. 6 programme suspensions were approved, 1 of these was an undergraduate intercalating degree and 5 were taught postgraduate degrees. Several programme and unit approval documents were reviewed and revised in 2020/21. The academic case form was revised to better align with the aims of the Curriculum Enhancement Project and the new University Strategy. A new streamlined Digital Twin academic case was approved for use where a digital twin of an existing programme is being considered. The unit and programme specification templates were revised to provide information in a more student-facing format.

2.11 *Plans for our Quality Framework in 21/22:* Reflections (by members of UQT reviews and in discussion with education leaders in each Faculty) following the second year of University Quality Team (UQT) reviews highlighted some areas of the University where there is sustained evidence of the quality and standards of educational provision. Therefore, a risk-based approach is being adopted for 21/22 and, in consultation with the relevant Dean and Faculty Education Directors, a number of areas (Biochemistry, Earth Sciences, History of Art, Innovation, Modern Languages, Music and Bristol Medical School) will not be visited in 21/22, unless

the school requests such engagement. These areas will still be expected to complete an EAP which will be reviewed by a University Education Director (Quality). This approach allows the team to focus their efforts more on areas where the offer of additional support would be beneficial, including where there may be concern over NSS outcomes. In consultation with the network of School Education Directors, the EAP template has been revised to improve its useability and to clearly link actions to school priorities. A small number of additional procedural changes have also been made to the UQT process to improve its functioning. Whilst no PPRs were initiated in 20/21 the quality team will take this opportunity to review this part of the quality framework and consider how a revalidation step might be better integrated with the work of the Curriculum Enhancement Project to maximise benefits from areas where staff efforts are focussed. It is intended that a refreshed PPR will re-commence from 2022/23.

3. Measures to Mitigate Ongoing Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic and their Outcomes in 20/21

3.1 *Summary of measures put in place in taught (UG and PGT) programmes:* In response to the national lockdown in January and the ongoing exacerbation of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic upon students and their studies during 20/21, the University introduced a series of measures to ensure that a student's final academic outcome was not disadvantaged. This was presented to students on undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes as a 'mitigations package' to support them in their assessments. In summary, these measures were:

- Students did not need to provide supporting evidence when submitting an 'extenuating circumstance' where it was related to Covid-19.
- Students were permitted to 'defer' online assessment to later in the year without the requirement to provide supporting evidence where they were unwell or due to other reason which meant they could not complete their assessment at that time.
- Students could access a guaranteed one-week coursework extension on request, without the need to provide supporting evidence.
- A review of the performance of student cohorts on undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes graduating in 2020/21 against previous cohorts unaffected by Covid-19 and mitigation of any *negative* impact on degree classification. Further detail of this process can be seen in Table 2 of the appendix. This process resulted in the exclusion of 83 units from classification for the 20/21 academic year: 49 at level 7 (5% of the units at this level), 25 at level 6 (4%) and 9 at level 5 (10%, although it is important to note that the number of units at this level was lower as fewer contribute to degree classification).

When the historical comparison of performance was combined with our previous commitment (of establishing a quantitative 'safety net' on undergraduate programmes for students completing units that contributed to classification from 19/20) four possible programme marks were calculated for every eligible student (see Table 3), with the student receiving the best outcome (i.e. highest classification). As a 'safety net' was not established or applicable for the majority of our taught postgraduate programmes in 19/20 (because a minimum number of marks were required to form a reliable estimate of academic performance), two possible programme marks for every eligible PGT student was calculated (see Table 3), with the student receiving the best outcome. In addition, a 'secondary rule' was introduced for the classification of taught postgraduate qualifications during 20/21. This meant that where a student was within 1% of the threshold for a merit or distinction, they were awarded the higher classification if 50% or more of their individual unit marks, weighted by credit point value, were achieved at that higher classification.

A University-level Taught Degrees Examination Board (UTDEB) was convened to allow faculty exam boards to refer cases, with their recommendation, for wider review and consideration where the volume of credit being excluded was beyond a threshold established in regulation or where the application of the temporary regulations for classification lead to a potentially unsound outcome. The purpose of the UTDEB was to ensure that outcomes were consistent with university regulation and that the scholarly integrity and rigour of assessment processes were maintained.

A common set of temporary regulations were approved to govern these mitigations. The standards required for the award of a degree or other qualification remained unchanged during 20/21. The principles and methodology for enacting this commitment was developed by a working group and signed off by the Vice-Chancellor. Student representatives were consulted at relevant points during its development. The features and rationale for this approach was communicated to staff, external examiners and our accrediting bodies, with training sessions held for Chairs and Secretaries of the examination boards. The functionality of our exam board reports was extended to automatically run the comparison check and present the exam boards

with the calculated programme marks and suggested classification outcome. Web pages for UG and PGT students explaining the mitigations for classification were published and students directed to the outcome of the cohort unit exclusion process when results were released to them.

The commitment to ensure we account for the impact of Covid-19 upon our students' results during 20/21 has since been extended such that **any** units that contribute to classification that were completed in 20/21 will be compared and may be excluded from classification under the same methodology when a student is considered for their degree in 21/22 and after.

3.2 *Summary of measures put in place in research degree programmes*: For research students (PGR), our contingency arrangements from 2019/20 were reactivated to support students with their research and so the examination process could function remotely. These measures were as follows:
- Students were able to submit their thesis for examination electronically.
- Student vivas were held online.
- The requirement for the viva to be conducted within four months of the submission was relaxed, although in most cases, vivas were held within the standard four-month timeframe.
- Extension requests for students with errors of substance or with a resubmission were provided where the reason for the request was related to the impact of Covid-19.
- Students were encouraged to include a Covid-19 statement in their dissertation if there was an impact on their research.

Some of the arrangements have since been incorporated into standard regulation and practice to reflect the positive impact they had.

3.3 *Impact upon Degree Classification:* Analysis and monitoring of degree outcomes has been undertaken to understand the effects of mitigations made in response to the pandemic and to assure the quality of the degrees awarded. As with the first year of the pandemic, it was understood at the outset that an element of grade inflation was a likely by-product of degree classification mitigations. The mitigations package in 2020/21 was designed to mitigate in a proportionate and granular way, only acting upon individual units that had underperformed (described in section 3.1). However, the 'best of four' marks available also took into consideration the commitments made in 2019/20's Safety Net. The 2020/21 outcomes should be considered within the context of a long-term continual increase in the proportion of top classifications awarded, a trend which pre-dates the pandemic. Benchmark data shows that our undergraduate trajectory is closely in line with both sector and Russell Group norms. Postgraduate taught outcomes are not currently externally benchmarked, although this is expected to change in the near future due to new Office for Student (OfS) proposals (see section 4.4).

The proportion of First Class Honours awarded in **undergraduate degrees** increased, from 37.2% in 19/20 to 40.2% in 20/21. Without the 20/21 mitigations there would have been only 34.7% Firsts. This would have represented a reduction on the previous year, in light of the significant increase in 2019/20 that was mostly attributable to the Safety Net. The proportion of Upper Second Class Honours decreased from 54.6% in 19/20 to 53.3% 20/21 due to the action of the mitigations lifting graduates out of the 2:1 class and into Firsts. The proportion of graduates being awarded a 'good degree' (Firsts and 2:1s combined) increased from 91.8% in 2019/20 to 93.5% in 20/21. Without the 2021 mitigations the 'good degrees' figure for 20/21 would have been 92.1%. Around **300** undergraduate students benefitted from an upgraded final classification due to the 2021 degree classification mitigations; circa 6% of the graduating class. Over half of these were due to the 'best of four marks' options that included the Safety Net commitments from the previous year. Only around a quarter of the upgrades were due to the exclusion of marks from underperforming units. The remaining upgrades were ascribed to 'other' reasons which would include discretionary board decisions and other mitigating factors (e.g. Industrial Action from before 20/21 affected assessments).

In last year's Quality Assurance Report to the Board, it was noted that the effects of the Safety Net from 19/20 would continue to ripple forward for intermediate year undergraduates for the duration of their studies. We see that effect in 20/21 undergraduate outcomes where the ongoing commitments from 19/20's Safety Net are the single greatest factor behind the increase in top class outcomes in 2020/21.

The impact of mitigations on **postgraduate taught (PGT) degrees** has generally been smaller than seen for undergraduates. The proportion of PGT students receiving Distinctions increased from 23.5% in 19/20 to 30.8% in 20/21. Without the mitigations in place, the proportion of Distinctions would have been 29.1%. The proportion of Merits increased from 43.4% in 19/20 to 46.3% in 20/21. Without the mitigations the 20/21 figure for Merits would have been higher at 47.1%, but this change is accounted for by Merit students being

upgraded to Distinction as part of the mitigations. Around **80** PGT students benefitted from an upgraded final classification due to the 2021 degree classification mitigations. Nearly 70% of those upgrades were attributable to the exclusion of marks from underperforming units. Only four PGT upgrades arose due to the ongoing commitments of the Safety Net, the impact of which was limited due to the shorter duration of PGT programmes (typically 1 year). As with undergraduate, the remaining upgrades were for 'other' discretionary or mitigatory reasons.

A Postgraduate taught secondary rule was implemented for 2020/21. A total of 185 students benefitted from upgraded classifications due, in whole or in part, to the secondary rule; this forms a little over 6% of the graduating PGT cohort. 162 of the 185 received their classification on the basis of the secondary rule alone, i.e. their upgrade did not derive from the cohort unit exclusion or ongoing commitment to the safety net. The PGT secondary rule was used for 2020/21 only and we do not foresee it will be used again in the current or future academic years.

The mitigations have generally had a positive effect on further closing attainment gaps for equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) groups at undergraduate level, although the modelling shows that these gaps would also have continued to close without the mitigations. At postgraduate taught level, the effect on attainment gaps is more complex. This somewhat reflects the additional complexity of demographics within the PGT population and the wide variances by faculty.

The above analysis will form the basis of the University's 20/21 degree outcomes statement, as recommended by the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment (UKSCQA). To assure that we are protecting the value of our qualifications degree outcomes will be a theme for UQT reviews in 22/23.

4. Opportunities and Challenges for 21/22

4.1 *Ongoing challenge from COVID19:* Unfortunately, the pandemic is continuing to present challenges for our education provision. Due to travel restrictions over the summer/autumn of 2021 and the difficulties this has presented for overseas students wishing to join us two faculties are offering some of their programmes as a hybrid (that is study can be either on-campus or online) variants this year (57 in Engineering and 67 in Social Sciences & Law). Such a hybrid offer brings additional complexities in how we support students and impacts on methods of both teaching and assessment and is a topic picked up in UQT reviews as appropriate. As highlighted previously, the disruption to secondary education has resulted in a significant increase in students joining Bristol who are likely to be less prepared for academic study. This concern is magnified by the significant overshoots seen across the institution that resulted from the manner in which A level grades were determined in 2021 (UG intake target for 21/22 was 6586 compared to 7897 recruited – 20% overshoot). Whilst additional resource has been made available to schools to help them manage the pressure the unexpected increase in student numbers has brought, initial UQT visits have suggested that this can be difficult to utilise in a way that is timely. We also need to recognise that these large UG cohorts will learn with us for at least another two years and hence the pressure on staff and space will continue for some time yet. The reliance on online assessment is posing continued challenge, both in terms of our digital infrastructure (as detailed in the Assessment Review report) but also in maintaining academic integrity with some areas of the university dealing with increases in the numbers of students colluding or contracting work to cheat on major assessments. Discipline differences in the types of knowledge being tested can make spotting collusion or contract cheating very difficult e.g. mathematical questions where similar answers are expected if students are correct. Proctoring has been used to preserve the integrity of some remote examinations, but its intrusive nature and technical complexities means it has been limited to programmes with professional body requirements. A move back to accommodating more high stakes assessments on campus, where it is appropriate pedagogically, is essential. To improve clarity and consistency in dealing with academic misconduct of this kind the assessment regulations were revised for 21/22 and compulsory student training material is being considered for 22/23. A new network for academic integrity officers from across the university will enable the sharing of good practice in prevention and detection of academic misconduct during this academic year.

4.2 *Further Industrial Action in 21/22:* Ongoing dispute in relation to pay and pensions will result in the experience of our students being affected by industrial action in the 21/22 academic year. At the time of writing an initial period of strike action has occurred and appeared to have had limited impact due to its short timescale. A second strike period, of 10 days over February/March, together with action short of a strike is likely to have a more significant impact although, as in previous years, it is likely to be localised to specific areas. Schools are recording activity and its likely impact so that this can be considered by exam boards to

ensure students are not disadvantaged. It is as yet unclear what further industrial action may occur during the rest of the 21/22 academic year. It is important to highlight that when this action is combined with the effects of the pandemic and the strike action in 19/20, undergraduate students who are in their final year of study and thus responding to the NSS in 2022 are likely to be viewing their education experience as highly disrupted.

4.3 *Student Feedback:* This academic year we will expand our opportunities to gather student feedback, both in terms of national surveys and local feedback. We will continue to engage with the National Students Survey (NSS) and the Postgraduate Research Student Survey (PRES) and encourage schools to promote these to our student body. This year we will also enter the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) allowing us to capture feedback from PGT students but, importantly, to benchmark this. At a local level, the University is implementing a new digital tool, Blue (Bristol Live Unit Evaluations) for use in both mid-unit and end of unit evaluation surveys. Implementation in this first year includes units in all schools except for Medicine and Dentistry who should be brought in during the next academic year. Blue allows unit surveys to run with a mixture of student and locally applicable question sets. The National Student Survey (NSS) questions were a factor considered when designing the questions for end of Unit evaluation and it is hoped that the data from these will provide us with greater insights into some of our NSS results. The system incorporates processes to share student feedback quickly with staff and a mechanism for staff to respond to students on their feedback. The system provides powerful aggregate reports for unit by Unit and Programme Directors and schools and faculties, these are currently in development.

4.4 *The Changing External Environment:* The Higher Education sector in England is moving into a period of significant regulatory change in terms of the Office for Students (OfS) re-launching the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) and introducing numeric thresholds, in continuation, completion and progression, to determine compliance with condition B3 (student outcomes). Consultation on these extensive proposals is currently underway, and we are collating an institutional response via a range of stakeholders. It is important to highlight that a very short timescale (i.e September 2022) is proposed for the introduction of both of these new measures, which will place significant additional burden on staff at a time when the impacts of both the pandemic and the over-recruitment of first year undergraduates are still being felt. The OfS is also planning further consultation (summer 2022) on the questions used in the NSS and how the data generated is presented. In light of the use of the NSS in TEF and external league tables this could be another influential change.

4.5 *Opportunities:* It is important to consider what opportunities the challenges discussed can bring. Whilst covid has brought significant disruption to our education provision, the interrogation of our degree outcomes data (see above) suggests the educational experience it produced may have contributed to the closing of some attainment gaps. In addition, discussions with schools have highlighted practice that has benefited the student's learning experience. It is important that these significant benefits are not lost as we move towards a new, post-pandemic 'normal'. Harnessing such changes should contribute towards improving student satisfaction (as measured by the NSS) which will be essential if we are to realise the Boards ambition to become a 'top ten' Institution. Whilst the regulatory changes being proposed by the OfS are likely to bring additional burden for the institution, considering how they can be integrated into our internal quality framework so that they bring value and relevance will be essential for us to be agile in our response to potential breeches of the student outcomes (B3) condition. This will be difficult at a time when an understandable desire to streamline administration can frame quality assurance as a luxury rather than core business for our institution.

Appendix

Figure 1: Diagrammatic representation of our quality framework illustrating how key quality assurance inputs feed into a school's education action plan and how review and oversight of quality assurance activity occurs within our governance system. Abbreviations: PSRB - Professional, statutory and regulatory bodies.
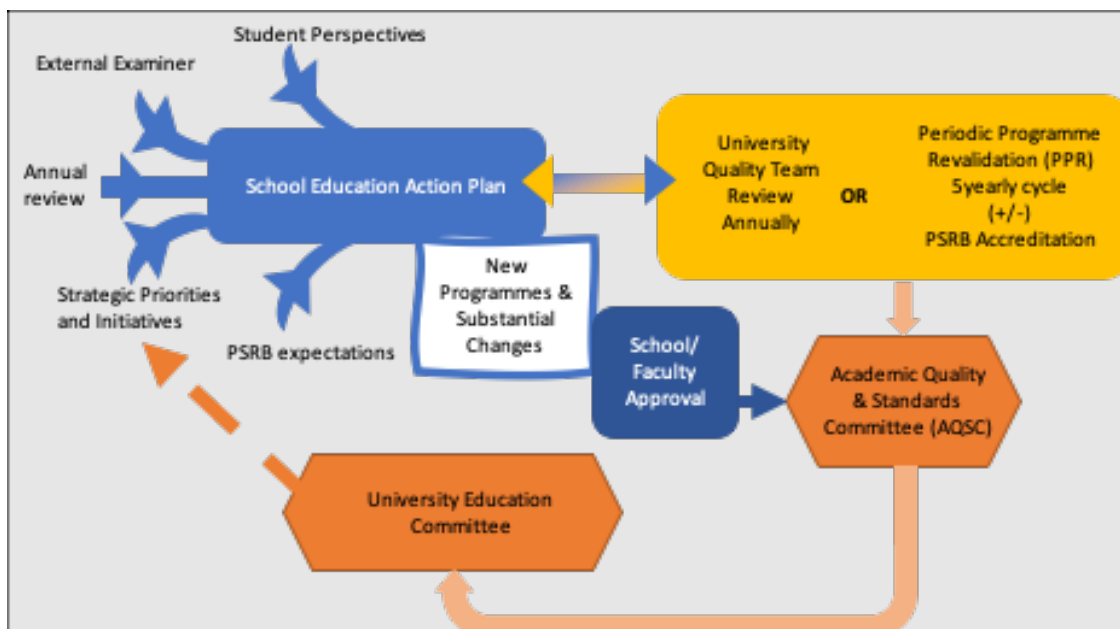
Table 1: Detail of where accredited programmes were offered across the University of Bristol in 2020/21

	Number of Accredited Programmes	Number of Professional Bodies
Faculty of Arts	0	0
Faculty of Engineering	47	11
Faculty of Health Sciences	13	6
Faculty of Life Sciences	9	1
Faculty of Science	55	8
Faculty of Social Sciences and Law	72	12

Table 2: Details of how the cohort mitigation process was enacted in 20/21

Description of Step Taken
Comparing the pattern of marks achieved in 20/21 in each unit with the pattern of marks achieved by cohorts in years unaffected by COVID-19
Checking whether students collectively underperformed in 20/21 by use of a statistical test beyond the variation we might expect to see from year to year.
Calculating an alternative degree average for a student where an underperformance was identified in a unit, as indicated by the test, by excluding the mark(s) from classification.

Further details of this process and how it was explained to undergraduate and taught postgraduate students was detailed on our website.

Table 3: Summary of the programme marks calculated in 20/21 for each student for classification purposes. The best outcome from the use of each of the taught component marks was used for classification.

	Completed Programme Mark (A)	Safety Net Mark (B)	Cohort Unit Exclusion Mark (C)	Safety Net Mark + Cohort Exclusion Mark (D)
Undergraduate Students	Unit marks from:	Unit marks from a student's:	Unit marks from a student's:	Unit marks from a student's:

	i) all years of study contributing to the degree	i) intermediate years of study that contribute to classification prior to 19/20 (if applicable) ii) 19/20 safety net iii) 20/21 final year of study.	i) intermediate years of study that contribute to classification prior to 20/21 ii) 20/21 year of study which have **not** been excluded due to a cohort impact.	i) intermediate years of study that contribute to classification prior to 19/20 (if applicable), ii) 19/20 safety net iii) 20/21 year of study which have not been excluded due to a cohort impact.
Taught Postgraduate Units	Unit marks from: i) the taught component.	Not applicable	Unit marks from a student's: i) 20/21 year of study which have not been excluded due to a cohort impact.	Not applicable