

Teaching The British Way: My Daily Cup Of Tea

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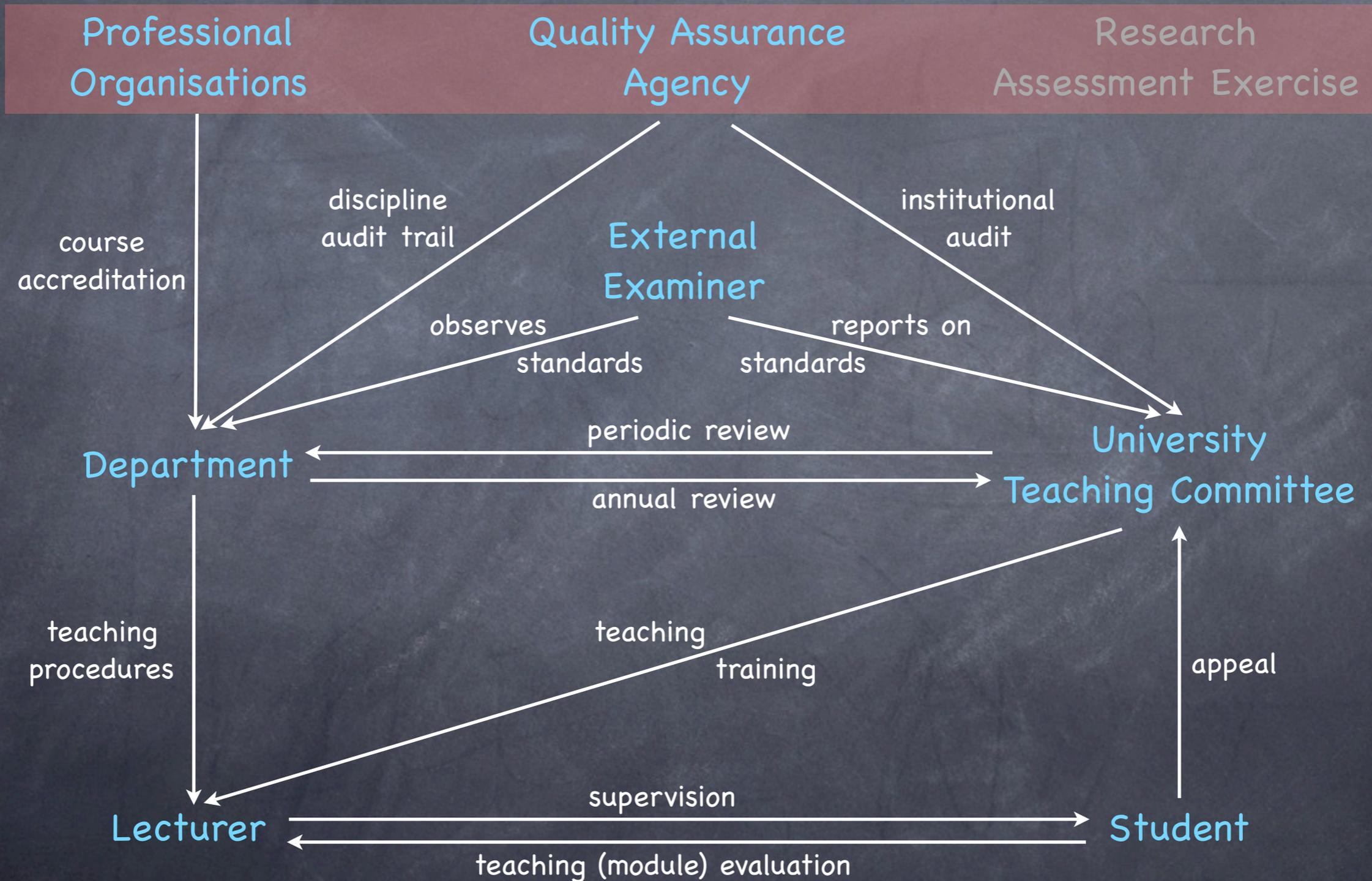
Background

- The UK is known for its **service-oriented teaching culture**
- York is among the Top Ten of UK Universities
- Computer Science at York is highly rated in **league tables**
 - RAE 6* for research (top mark)
 - "Excellent" for teaching (top mark)
 - 2nd according to The Guardian (only to Imperial College)
 - 3rd in a survey of recently graduated students
- How to achieve teaching "quality", and thus good league table results and visibility among prospective students?

This Presentation

- Is a mix of information and personal report on teaching “quality” in the UK
- Does not necessarily reflect the views of my employer
- Makes quite a number of simplifications; the real world is, as always, complex and messy
- Must be understood in the context of the importance of published league tables
- Organisation of this talk:
 - Part I: The UK quality framework
 - Part II: Supervision of students at York
 - Part III: Teaching a module at York

UK Quality Framework: The Players



Teaching Quality: Rules of the Game

- Mix of external control & self control
 - Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA)
 - Professional Organisations (e.g., BCS, IEE)
 - External Examiner
 - University & Departmental Teaching Committees
- Peer review & student feedback
 - From peer observation of teaching to module questionnaires
- Documented procedures and forms (audit trails)
 - Staff & student handbooks (combined >300 pages!)

Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)

- Independent body founded in 1997
- Carries out **institutional audits** using peer reviews
 - Visits each university once about every six years
 - Ensures quality and academic standards
- Defines quality standards
 - **Subject benchmarks** – degree standard expectations
 - **Programme specifications** – sets of information that each institution provides about its degree courses
 - **Code of practice** – from recruitment to assessment
- **Writes public reports** on institutions & departments

Professional Organisations

- Such as the British Computer Society (BCS)
- Provide **course accreditation** (**important for publicity**)
 - Exempts graduated students from some examinations for professional membership
- **Accreditation visits** to departments every 3-5 years
 - Reviewing standards, checking documentation, talking to lecturers & students
- First requirement for accreditation – **quality assurance**
 - From procedures (**audit trails**), to module syllabi, to teaching materials, to student representation

Further Requirements For Accreditation

• Learning support

- From staff/student ratio, to library facilities, to technical support, to staff training, to student welfare

• Learning outcomes that graduates must have achieved

- Cognitive abilities (knowledge & understanding)
- Practical abilities (such as working in a team)
- **Transferable skills** (ethics, managing one's own learning)

• Project criteria

- From project nature (must be problem solving), to volume of work, to project type (individual/group), to project-report style (systems' life cycle)

External Examiner

- Appointed by the University for each degree course
 - A senior academic who is experienced in the subject
- Purposes of external examining:
 - Verify that academic standards are appropriate for the award of degrees
 - Help institutions to assure and maintain academic standards across higher education awards
 - Help institutions to ensure that their assessment processes are sound and fairly operated
- External examining is part of QAA's code of practice

External Examiner (cont'd)

- Reviews **exam papers**
 - Before they are handed out to students!
- Participates in **examiners' boards**
 - Randomly samples the marking of exam papers and particularly of project reports
 - Looks carefully at borderline students
- Gives advice on matters of teaching policies & practices
- **Writes reports to the University**
 - Visible to the QAA and to the public!
 - Department needs to respond ("closing the loop")

University Teaching Committee (UTC)

- Develops policies, strategies and **quality assurance structures** for teaching, learning & assessment
- **Monitors and evaluates teaching & learning**
 - Considers external examiner's reports, QAA subject review reports, ...
- Promotes innovation/dissemination of **good teaching, learning & assessment practice**
- Scrutinises proposals for new degree programmes or modifications to existing programmes
- Interfaces to the **Special Cases Committee** (appointed by the University Senate) that deals with student appeals

UTC Periodic Review Of Departments

- Every six years a full review, and in between a visit
- Also part of QAA's code of practice
- Monitors standards and relevance of taught programmes
- Focuses on the quality of the student experience
- Reflects on the effectiveness of quality management and enhancement processes within a department
- Visit team includes two external assessors

Documentation Needed For QAA/UTC Visits

- Self-evaluation document
- Programme specifications
- Annual programme reviews
- Staff & student handbooks
- Minutes of departmental teaching committees
- Written statements on assessment practices
- Information regarding the use of teaching assistants
- Details of the Peer Observation of Teaching scheme
- ... and much more (8x1 moving-boxes full of documents)



Part II: Student Supervision At York

- Every student is allocated a supervisor (member of staff)
- The supervisor
 - Helps and advises on all aspects of life at university
 - Is the first point of contact in case of **personal and academic problems**
 - Discusses **student progress**, academic choices and personal development
 - Is consulted in case of **disciplinary procedures** against a supervisee
- **Supervisors and students are required to meet regularly**

Start-/End-Of-Term Supervision Meetings

- Compulsory one-to-one meetings between supervisor and supervisee in the first and last week of each term
- Checks on academic matters such as which modules to take, or experiences with taken modules
- Checks on personal matters such as accommodation, finance and health
- What if a student does not show up?
 - Try to contact the student via e-mail or phone
 - Try to contact the student at parent's home
 - Send a formal warning to the student's home address

Start-Of-Term Supervision Form

THE UNIVERSITY <i>of York</i>		ORANGE	
Department of Computer Science			
START-OF-TERM SUPERVISION			
<i>To be completed by supervisor.</i>			
Student's name	Course (eg 1X0,3N1)	Term (1-12)	Supervisor
If any problems could affect exams or other assessed work, the student should be advised to complete a green Extenuating Circumstances form and provide supporting evidence.			
modules this term (Please list them. Timetable okay?)			
accommodation (This term? Next term or next year, if appropriate?)			
money (Free from worries about fees, living costs? No serious debts?)			
health (Any illness during vacation? Any continuing health problems?)			
Any other issues the student wishes to raise? (eg departmental policies/facilities)			
Student's signature:		Date completed:	
Supervisor's signature:			

End-Of-Term Supervision Form

THE UNIVERSITY of York
Department of Computer Science
END-OF-TERM SUPERVISION
*To be completed by student and supervisor jointly as a record of their meeting to review the term.
Continue comments overleaf if necessary.*

Student's name	Course (eg IX0, 3N1)	Term (1-12)	Supervisor
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Module	The student's experience of this module: For instance: Was it enjoyable? Did the student learn a lot?	Comments on the presentation of the module. For instance: Was it well taught? Were the lectures/practicals particularly useful?	Eval. form?

General Well-being: Is all well under each of the following headings? If so, please confirm; if not, give brief details. If any problems could affect exams or other assessed work, the student should complete a green Extenuating Circumstances form.

health (Any time lost this term? Any continuing problems?)

accommodation (Current and future?)

money (Free from worries about fees, living costs? No serious debts?)

vacation plans (Able to relax/revise as appropriate?)

motivation to study (Enjoyed the term? Still keen to pursue the course?)

Any other issues the student wishes to raise? (eg departmental policies/facilities)

Finalists: Please record destination (employer & salary, PhD, MSc etc)

Student's signature: _____ Date completed: _____

Supervisor's signature: _____

*Please pass completed forms to the departmental office.
Forms are reviewed by the Chair of the Teaching Committee before being placed on the student's file.*

Student experience:

Was the module enjoyable?

Did the student learn a lot?

Was it well taught?

Were the lectures/practicals useful?

Vacation plans:

Able to relax/revise as appropriate?

Motivation to study:

Enjoyed the term?

Still keen to pursue the course?

First-Year Tutorials

- Are compulsory weekly meetings w/ groups of 4 students
- Aim at broadening students' knowledge & experience
- Offer advice on lecture material
- Cover supplementary topics:
 - Essay writing & presentations
 - Literature searches
 - Meaning and avoidance of plagiarism & collusion
 - Issues related to ethics & professional conduct

Personal Development Planning

- Supervisor as a facilitator
- Helps students to set aims for their professional future
- Reviews their progress and plans each year, and identify training needs
- Discusses w/ each supervisee what it means to be in the Computer Science profession
- Points students to help in finding placements and jobs
- Provides advice and assistance in writing CVs
- Discusses the benefits of further academic education in terms of masters or research courses

Disciplinary Procedure

- For academic, pastoral and legal reasons
- A written **caution** is sent to students if they fail to attend compulsory practicals or other meetings
 - Cautions are cancelled if the student was absent for valid reasons, e.g., visiting a doctor
- A **formal warning** is sent to students who accumulate cautions or fail to regularly engage in their studies
 - Students need to formally reply to formal warnings
 - **Formal warnings are considered by the Board of Examiners when discussing student progress**

Extenuating Circumstances

- Sometimes academic achievement is hindered by illness, death of a relative or pet, or other circumstances
 - Supervisors must point students to available support within the University (e.g., Counselling Services)
 - Supervisors must file reports of student problems
 - Students may confidentially fill in an extenuating circumstances form
- Valid extenuating circumstances are always considered sympathetically and are alleviated, e.g., by
 - Extending hand-in deadlines
 - Writing off affected assessments, condoning failures in exams, or adjusting the pass mark

Extenuating Circumstances Form

Board of Studies in Computer Science **CONFIDENTIAL** *Extenuating Circumstances*
Please read the notes on the reverse of this form.

NAME	YEAR	DEGREE
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a) Please list closed examinations or open assessments which you missed entirely. Give reasons, and attach supporting evidence.

b) If you wish to account for the late hand-in of any open assessments, please give reasons and attach supporting evidence.

c) If you believe that your performance in some (or all) open assessments and/or closed examinations has been impaired, please give reasons, and attach evidence. You must state which assessments and/or closed papers you believe were affected.

d) If you believe that your project has been impaired, please give reasons, and attach evidence. You must state what was affected, eg, lit. review, analysis, evaluation, write-up period.

SIGNED _____ DATE _____

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THE UNIVERSITY of York

Board of Studies in Computer Science

EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES FORM

You **must** complete this form if you would like the Board of Examiners and associated meetings of the Board of Studies to take account of any circumstances when considering your performance in closed examinations, open assessments or project work.

You do **not** need to complete a form for circumstances already covered by an official Leave of Absence (you will have a letter from the Board of Studies or University stating that Leave has been granted), or circumstances covered by an extension to a hand-in (this is noted on your hand-in receipt).

Completed forms are retained for use at the meeting which determines your degree outcome. This includes decisions on students who have failed to meet criteria for continuation. The Department **cannot** accept information submitted after a meeting has arrived at its decision. This is because the Department can only make decisions on degree outcomes in the presence of, and with the explicit agreement of, the External Examiners. If you decide later that you should have made a case, you will have to initiate an Appeal to the University (Special Cases Committee for undergraduates, or Board for Graduate Schools for MSc students).

Please complete all sections which are relevant. You may complete further forms if necessary. You may continue your submission on separate sheets, but please **sign and date** each sheet and ensure that these are **stapled** to this sheet. All forms are retained; you do not need to repeat information from previous forms.

You **must supply supporting evidence**. This should be a statement from a person competent to assess your case professionally. In practice this means a doctor's note if you have been ill; evidence such as a crime number if you've been the victim of crime; a copy of the official notice letter if your University accommodation was subject to maintenance at crucial times, etc. Please indicate what, if any, evidence has already been sent or given to the Department. If you need advice as to what evidence you need to submit, you should consult the Chair of Board of Examiners.

Forms should be submitted to the Department Reception no later than the end of the **week before** the External Examiners' Meeting for your course. If Reception is closed, the Examination Officer (Valerie Atkinson) or Examinations Secretary (Christine Linfoot) or Department Office can accept forms. As a last resort, put your form in Valerie Atkinson's named pigeonhole, in the room behind the Office. When you submit your form, you will be issued with a **receipt**. You must keep this as evidence of submission. If you have left a form in a pigeonhole, it is your responsibility to return for your receipt.

External Examiners Meetings are as follows (exact dates are on the Department local exams WWW page):

- All finalists including MEng year 4 final meeting: Summer week 10: *degree classifications.*
- MScIP final meeting: Autumn week 5: *award of MSc, Diploma.*
- Advanced MSc final meeting: Autumn week 6: *award of MSc, Diploma or Certificate.*
- Intermediate meeting: all undergraduates, MScIP taught modules: Summer week 10.
- Intermediate meeting: Advanced MSc: Summer week 8.

NOTE that **Intermediate** meetings can fail a student, or demote MSc/MEng student to a lower status degree, if the student has not met the appropriate criteria. If you may be in this situation, you must submit your form before the relevant meeting.

Part III: Teaching A Module At York

- Detailed **module syllabus** must be
 - Submitted/updated many months before the start of the academic and cannot be modified at short notice
 - Approved by the Department's Teaching Committee
- A typical **10-credits module in York** involves 100 hrs. of work for the student, including
 - 18 hrs. (50 mins. each) of lectures, 9 hrs. of practicals
 - Either an open assessment or a closed exam
- **Teaching materials** (lectures, exercises and specimen solutions, **feedback**) must be made available to students

Module Assessments

- All assessments/exams must be ready, with specimen solutions/marking schemes, at the beginning of term
- Assessments are first cross-checked by a colleague and then sent for comment to the External Examiner
- Assessments must be marked by the lecturer, not a teaching assistant
- Students must be given feedback on their answers, either collectively or individually via a feedback form
- Problems with an assessment must be reported to the Chair of the Board of Examiners

Dealing With Academic Misconduct

- Samples of answers to open assessments are routinely checked for plagiarism using special software
- If collusion or plagiarism is suspected:
 - A committee consisting of the lecturer and Teaching Committee representatives is assembled
 - Students under suspicion are interviewed and all of their other submitted works are also re-checked
 - A written report is sent to the Board of Examiners (including the External Examiner) which must then act according to a University-wide procedure (29 pages!)

Board of Examiners

- Decides on student progress, i.e., whether they pass the academic year and may continue their studies
 - Considers extenuating circumstances of students
- Receives module marks proposed by the module lecturer
 - May scale marks or change pass mark in case an exam turned out to be too difficult
- Decides borderlines for degree classifications
- Can make special cases on behalf of students to the University (e.g., recommend the award of Distinction)
- Is guided by the External Examiner in borderline cases

Enforcing Teaching Quality

• Peer Observation of Teaching

- Each year, a colleague sits in one's lecture or practical
- A written report is discussed with the lecturer and filed with the Head of Department

• Module Evaluation Forms

- Distributed & evaluated by the University
- Considered by the Department's Teaching Committee

• Student Representatives

- Each course has a student rep who can talk to the Course Co-ordinator or Head of Department about problems with a module or lecturer

Teaching Training

- E.g., York Certificate of Academic Practice
- New lecturers must enrol in teaching training courses
 - With formal examinations
 - 600 hours of study, over 3 years
 - Often leading towards a Masters of Education degree
- Aims of such courses:
 - To equip participants w/ pedagogic knowledge & skills
 - To introduce participants to teaching policies/practices
- Teaching assistants must be trained as well

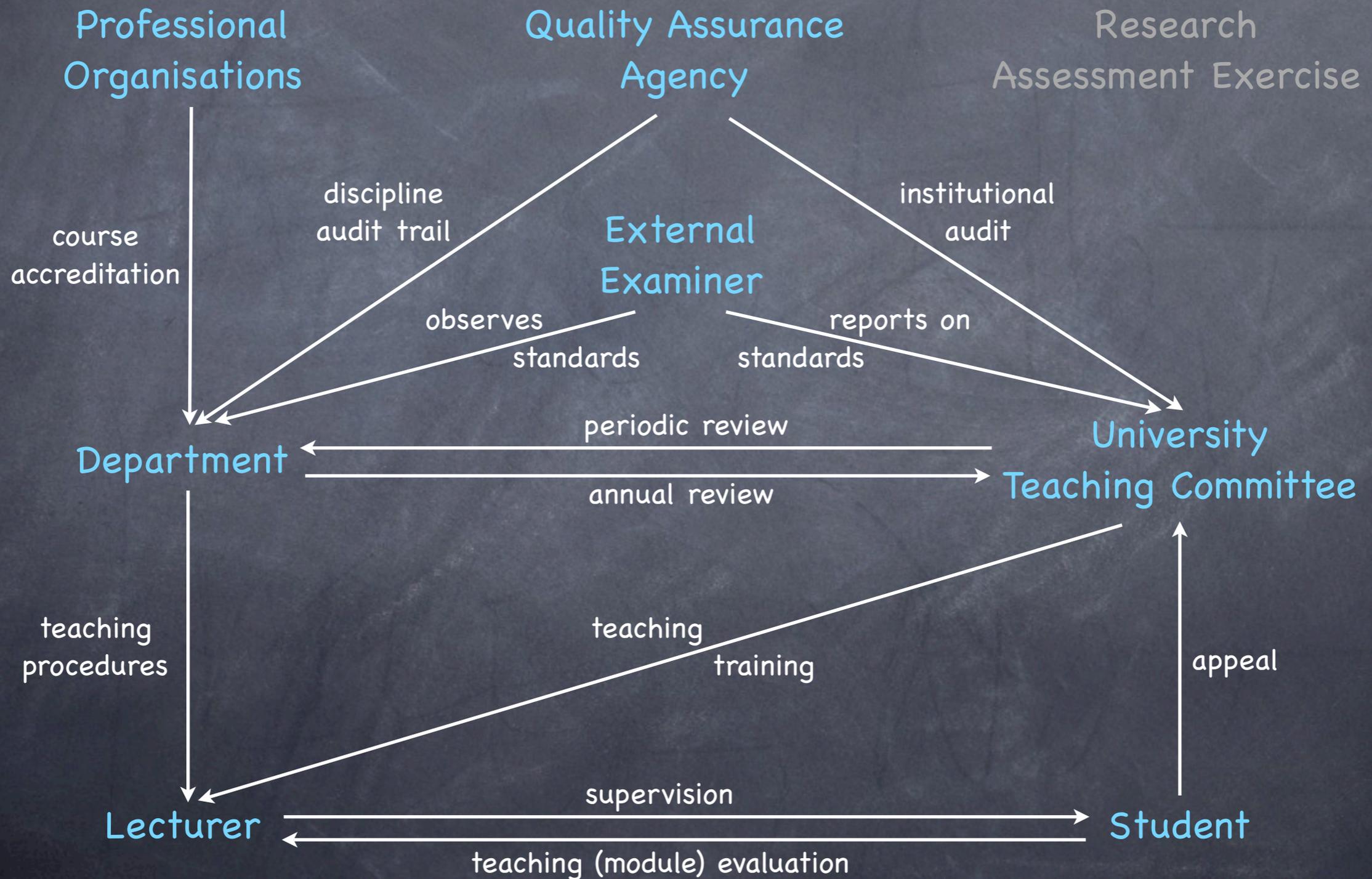
Student Appeals

- Students may appeal against a decision by the Board of Examiners/Studies at University-level (and even UK-level)
- Appeals cannot be made on grounds of academic judgement but on late evidence or “technicalities”
 - Was the student warned about poor performance?
 - Was the student trained on what plagiarism means?
 - Was the student given adequate supervision and, e.g., technical support?
- Once the University’s Special Cases Committee considers an appeal (or worse, hears an appeal)
 - A lot of paperwork has to be attended to by the lecturer and the Department’s Teaching Committee

My Personal Conclusions

- Quality frameworks do not necessarily improve the quality of teaching, but they do **improve the students' learning experience**
- Quality frameworks are not for free but come at the price of a much **increased administration overhead**
 - I spend about 6 hours per term week on lectures, practicals, marking & project supervision
 - I spend about 3 hours per term week on student supervision, tutorials & paperwork
- **The system tends to discourage students from being proactive**; students know that there is always a safety net!

View Teaching Quality The British Way: Have A Cup Of Tea First!



Further Information

- Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) web site

- www.qaa.ac.uk

- Higher Education Funding Council for England web site

- www.hefce.ac.uk

- British Computer Society (BCS) web site

- www.bcs.org.uk

- Universities UK web site

- www.universitiesuk.ac.uk

- University of York web site

- www.york.ac.uk