Higher Education Review: Wales of Aberystwyth University

April 2016

Contents

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review: Wales conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Aberystwyth University. The review took place from 18 to 21 April 2016 and was conducted by a team of four reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Hastings McKenzie
- Miss Claire Morgan
- Professor Denis Wright
- Miss Sarah Crook (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by Aberystwyth University and to make judgements as to whether or not its academic standards and quality meet UK expectations. These expectations are the statements in the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code)[1] setting out what all UK higher education providers expect of themselves and of each other, and what the general public can therefore expect of them.

In Higher Education Review: Wales the QAA review team:

- makes judgements on
  - the setting and maintenance of academic standards
  - the quality of student learning opportunities
  - the information provided about higher education provision
  - the enhancement of student learning opportunities
- provides a commentary on the selected theme
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice
- affirms action that the provider is taking or plans to take.

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. Explanations of the findings are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 4.

In reviewing Aberystwyth University, the review team has also considered internationalisation as a review theme.

The QAA website gives more information about QAA and its mission.[2] A dedicated section explains the method for Higher Education Review: Wales[3] and has links to the review handbook and other informative documents. For an explanation of terms see the Glossary at the end of this report.

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[1] The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code.
[2] QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us.
[3] Higher Education Review: Wales web pages:
www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Pages/Higher-Education-Review-Wales.aspx.

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Aberystwyth University

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at Aberystwyth University.

- The setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards **meet** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of the information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at Aberystwyth University.

- The pre-enrolment process and personalised support for students, including those with specific learning needs, which facilitates their entry to the University (Expectation B2).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to Aberystwyth University.

By September 2016:

- ensure the systematic involvement of students as partners in programme approval and review, and the enhancement of the student experience (Expectations B5, B1 and B8)
- ensure that a consistent approach to academic appeals is practised within and across institutes (Expectations B9, B6 and C)
- ensure that all postgraduate research students receive appropriate training before undertaking teaching and assessment (Expectations B11, B3 and B6)
- ensure consistency of core information provided to students in handbooks within and across institutes (Expectations C and B9).

By March 2017:

- consolidate and clearly articulate strategic priorities for the enhancement of learning opportunities at institute level (Enhancement).

Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms** the following actions that Aberystwyth University is already taking to improve the educational provision offered to its students.

- The steps being taken to implement formal periodic review processes at programme level (Expectation B8).

About Aberystwyth University

Founded in 1872, Aberystwyth University (the University) is a medium-sized, research-active University, which devolved from the University of Wales upon receipt of its own degree awarding powers and university title in 2007. It has a broad range of subjects across physical and natural science, social sciences, the humanities, and creative arts. The University operates mainly from the Penglais and Llanbadarn Campuses in Aberystwyth, but also has sites including the Old College and a research base at Gogerddan. In 2015, the University opened its Mauritius branch campus and began teaching a small number of students there, with further developments planned.

The University has just over 7,000 full-time students, including nearly 500 international students. It has over 2,000 part-time students, including 1,400 lifelong learners and 630 distance-learning students. Just under 800 full-time students define themselves as fluent in Welsh. The University has a long-standing commitment to the Welsh language and operates bilingually, using Welsh extensively in committees, on its website and in its internal and external documents. The University has good connections to the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol, hosts a Coleg branch, and has received grants to provide lectureships and scholarships.

The University's mission is articulated in its historic motto, which translates as 'A world without knowledge is no world at all'. Six strategic areas of focus support this motto: creating opportunities, research with excellence that makes an impact, teaching that inspires, engaging the world, working in partnership, and investing in our future.
The Strategic Plan articulates these priorities and identifies targets for 2012-17.

Since the last review, the University's number of full-time students has declined from a peak of 9,000, partly in response to the capping of student numbers in Wales and England, and changes in admissions procedures to ensure that intakes do not exceed sustainably planned levels. Following the appointment of a new Vice-Chancellor in 2011, the University restructured its executive team, academic and non-academic departments. In 2013 the University grouped its 17 academic departments into seven institutes and dissolved its three faculties. In 2014 it amalgamated one of the institutes into others. The University intends that these changes will support its sustainable future.

In 2016 the incumbent Vice-Chancellor's post comes to an end; the University has designated is Pro Vice-Chancellor Student Experience and International as the acting Vice-Chancellor.

The University considers its current key challenges to include teaching and research funding, adjusting to changes resulting from the Higher Education Wales Act 2015, responding to the interim and pending outcomes of the Diamond Review of Funding, and recruitment in a competitive market.

The University has a small number of partnerships, principally Boston Campus Limited, which provides non-teaching support to the Mauritius campus, and with Bangor University to provide the North and Mid-Wales Centre for Teaching Education. The University has a franchise agreement with Grŵp Llandrillo Menai and Coleg Cambria for delivery of a part-time foundation degree.

The University has addressed all the recommendations since its last review, evaluated by QAA in 2013.

Explanation of the findings about Aberystwyth University

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

Terms that may be unfamiliar to some readers have been included in a brief glossary at the end of this report. A fuller glossary of terms is available on the QAA website, and formal definitions of certain terms may be found in the operational description and handbook for the review method, also on the QAA website.

1   Judgement: The setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards

Expectation (A1): In order to secure threshold academic standards, degree-awarding bodies:

a) ensure that the requirements of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* are met by:

- **positioning their qualifications at the appropriate level of the relevant framework for higher education qualifications**
- **ensuring that programme learning outcomes align with the relevant qualification descriptor in the relevant framework for higher education qualifications**
- **naming qualifications in accordance with the titling conventions specified in the frameworks for higher education qualifications**
- **awarding qualifications to mark the achievement of positively defined programme learning outcomes**

b) consider and take account of QAA's guidance on qualification characteristics

c) where they award UK credit, assign credit values and design programmes that align with the specifications of the relevant national credit framework

d) consider and take account of relevant Subject Benchmark Statements.

Quality Code, *Chapter A1: UK and European Reference Points for Academic Standards*

Findings

1.1   The University's academic regulations, policies and processes are consistent with *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), award characteristics and Subject Benchmark Statements, and the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW). The regulations contain a list of award types and their associated credit structures, which demonstrates the level and volume of credit associated with each programme. The University approves taught awards at FHEQ Levels 4 to 7, which include diplomas and certificates that are available as intermediate awards to students who exit with the requisite amount of credit. It expects external examiners to confirm that the standards of awards are consistent with those of comparable institutions and with the FHEQ. Modules are calibrated against the CQFW as part of the approval process.

1.2   The Academic Quality Handbook describes the University's quality assurance polices and processes, and is available on the Academic Quality and Records Office's (AQRO) webpages. All proposals for new or revised schemes must include a completed programme specification template, which includes specific reference to the relevant Subject Benchmark Statement and academic level. The University requires departments to ensure that programme specifications remain consistent with Subject Benchmark Statements when the latter are revised. The University's regulations, policies and processes would allow Expectation A1 to be met.

1.3   In considering this Expectation the review team reviewed a range of documentation, including the University's academic regulations; relevant sections of the Academic Quality Handbook; course approval documentation, including programme specifications, external examiner reports for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes; and documents relating to the annual monitoring cycle. The review team tested its findings in meetings with University staff.

1.4   The University refers changes in the Quality Code, and other external reference points, to academic or service departments as appropriate, to ensure that the University operates consistently within the expectations. The Academic Board may adapt University policies after consultation with relevant subcommittees and/or officers. The Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) and the Research Degrees Committee (RDC) have reviewed (2015-16) the revised Master's Degree Characteristics Statement to ensure that the University's awards for taught, research and integrated master's degrees are consistent with the latest guidance and sector expectations.

1.5   External examiners for taught schemes confirm that standards of awards are consistent with the FHEQ and CQFW, and report on how the content, structure and learning outcomes set out in programme specifications reflect relevant national Subject Benchmark Statements and the expectations of relevant professional bodies, where applicable. External examiner reports are considered in the annual monitoring process, which also requires that programme specifications are kept up to date. The review team looked at a number of examples of external examiner reports for both undergraduate and taught postgraduate schemes, and reports from the annual monitoring cycle, including action plans considered at the QAC, and found that they were compliant with the University's Academic Quality Handbook.

1.6   In meetings with the review team staff clearly understood the use of external reference points during programme design and review. University approval panels for new courses confirm the use of national reference points during course design and the appropriateness of proposed award titles and learning outcomes. The University's criteria for its awards and naming conventions align with the FHEQ, and the University calibrates all modules against the CQFW as part of the module approval process.

1.7   The scheme approval and re-approval process requires panels to comment on the relationship between modular and scheme-level learning outcomes, and to confirm that they are appropriate to the level of the award and that credit values align with the CQFW.

1.8   The University takes due account of national qualification and credit frameworks in setting and maintaining academic standards. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A2.1): In order to secure their academic standards, degree-awarding bodies establish transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations to govern how they award academic credit and qualifications.

Quality Code, *Chapter A2: Degree-Awarding Bodies' Reference Points for Academic Standards*

Findings

1.9   The University oversees the standards and quality of its education provision through its committee structure. The Senate is the University's academic authority and reports to the University Council. The Senate has ultimate responsibility for academic quality in teaching and research, managing and approving the academic portfolio, and managing the regulation of the academic interests of the University. The Senate delegates responsibility for assuring standards and enhancing quality to the Academic Board. Academic Board subcommittees share responsibility for specific areas of the Quality Code and include the QAC, the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Committee (LTEC), the RDC, and the International and Collaborative Provision Committee (ICPC). The framework within which the Academic Board and its subcommittees, and institute examination boards, operate is formed through policies, processes and guidelines, collated in the Academic Quality Handbook. Overall responsibility for ensuring that unified institute and departmental examination boards operate in accordance with University requirements rests with the Senate Examination Boards. The QAC issues an annual checklist based on quality assurance policies as a reminder to departments. The AQRO is concerned with the academic administration of the University and provides central management of quality processes. The University's quality assurance systems and structures are sufficiently robust and would allow Expectation A2.1 to be met.

1.10   In evaluating the University's approach to this Expectation the review team examined the University's Academic Board and committees' terms of reference; academic regulations and the Academic Quality Handbook; organisational and committee structures; and committee minutes and reports of course approval events.

1.11   The University makes its criteria for the award of degrees, diplomas and certificates available online. The criteria align with the FHEQ and provide descriptors for Levels 4 to 7 for taught degrees, and for Levels 7 to 8 for research degrees. In meetings with the review team, University staff were clear about the use of the regulations and associated processes and procedures, and referred to the interactive, online Academic Quality Handbook on the AQRO website as a comprehensive collation of the definitive regulations and procedures, including examination conventions. The University publishes a policy on credits and the modular system, which forms part of the framework for credit and target awards, and intermediate awards. Students who accumulate sufficient credits but leave before completion of the target qualification may receive certificates or diplomas in higher education. The University articulates generic learning outcomes for these certificates and diplomas in the published criteria for the award of degrees, diplomas and certificates. Taught degree regulations, along with examination conventions, explain how the University makes award and progression decisions.

1.12   The University revised its regulations at all levels in 2013 in response to external review and internal analysis. More recent changes to regulations have followed the introduction of new integrated master's degrees, with the pass mark for all Level 7 modules being changed from 40 per cent to 50 per cent. The University has also introduced common levels of allowable credit failure for all master's degree Level 7 programmes. The University's Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR) for all students indicates European Credit

Transfer System (ECTS) values for all modules taken and includes details of the grading scheme, the function of the qualification and its professional status.

1.13　　A standard template provides the basis for, and consistency of, examination board minutes. The Senate examination board receives recommendations for awards and confirms all awards as appropriate. It approves all academic results, including those from franchised programmes and the Mauritius Branch Campus, through the same system. The AQRO organises regular briefings to identify points of emphasis for Boards and to make those involved aware of the current regulations.

1.14　　Professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) accredit and confirm the quality and standards of a substantial proportion of the University's degree programmes, and the Academic Quality Handbook describes the University's procedures on PSRB accreditation. The University requires institutes to comment on whether they intend to seek PSRB accreditation as part of the programme approval process, and to reflect on any related matters as part of annual monitoring; they also report to the Academic Board on periodic accreditation events. The Academic Board considers all PSRB accreditation reports and may require institutes to prepare action plans in response. The Academic Board maintains a register of accredited programmes.

1.15　　The University's academic regulations and Academic Quality Handbook are comprehensive and align with the expectations of the Quality Code, and are subject to regular evaluation and review. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation:　Met
Level of risk:　Low

Expectation (A2.2): Degree-awarding bodies maintain a definitive record of each programme and qualification that they approve (and of subsequent changes to it) which constitutes the reference point for delivery and assessment of the programme, its monitoring and review, and for the provision of records of study to students and alumni.

Quality Code, *Chapter A2: Degree-Awarding Bodies' Reference Points for Academic Standards*

Findings

1.16   Programme specifications provide the University's definitive record of each of its taught qualifications. Departments provide a programme specification, setting out the learning outcomes for each award and structures of the proposed scheme, at the approval stage. For research degrees, the University develops a definitive record of the programme at approval stage. Once approved, programme specifications become available online through the online study scheme database. This provides the definitive version and links to the definitive module database. External examiners base their annual monitoring of programmes on these programme specifications and scheme structures. The University's requirements are sufficiently robust and would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.17   In considering this Expectation, the review team examined the Academic Quality Handbook and other relevant documentation. The review team also met staff involved in course approval, monitoring and review.

1.18   Staff complete all proposals for new or revised programmes using a programme specification template, which includes specific reference to the relevant Subject Benchmark Statement and FHEQ level. Responsibility for ensuring that programme specifications remain consistent with Subject Benchmark Statements when the latter are revised rests with departments. In meetings with the review team staff demonstrated a good understanding of programme specifications and their role in the assurance of standards.

1.19   The programme specifications demonstrate compliance with the University's academic and regulatory frameworks, and the requirements laid out in the Academic Quality Handbook. The programme specification for each course lists the title of the scheme and describes target awards in relation to FHEQ qualification level descriptors, Subject Benchmark Statements and any relevant professional body standards. It lists the units that contribute to a course by their title, level and credit value, and identifies whether a unit is core or optional. The programme specification summarises how lecturers should teach and assess students, and describes course aims and learning outcomes, including the knowledge and skills that students will attain on achievement of the award. The AQRO provides guidance for reviewing and archiving programme specifications, and ensures that staff carry this out annually.

1.20   Separate processes govern modifications to modules and programmes depending on whether changes are considered minor or major. The Academic Quality Handbook describes these processes, which are clearly understood by staff who met the review team.

1.21   The student record system generates transcripts for students and graduates. The University issues a HEAR to all students on completion of their award. The HEAR refers to the specific scheme taken by the student and provides the credit/ECTS equivalents of modules taken, the grading scheme applied, aim of the qualification, and its professional status if applicable. The University continues to develop the HEAR in line with the Student Success Plan.

1.22   Programme specifications provide a definitive record of the University's taught degree provision, and are approved and modified through an appropriate process. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A3.1): Degree-awarding bodies establish and consistently implement processes for the approval of taught programmes and research degrees that ensure that academic standards are set at a level which meets the UK threshold standard for the qualification and are in accordance with their own academic frameworks and regulations.

Quality Code, *Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards*

Findings

1.23 The Academic Board delegates programme approval responsibilities to two subcommittees: responsibility for programme approval and review rests with the QAC, and responsibility for maintaining an overview of new schemes, suspensions and withdrawals rests with the Academic Development and Planning Committee (ADPC). Equivalent committee oversight exists for research degrees and collaborative provision. Committees' terms of reference indicate how their responsibilities related to sections of the Quality Code.

1.24 Programme specifications make reference to levels, accreditations and Subject Benchmark Statements, and module information notes the academic level. The University publishes criteria for each level and type of award aligned with the CQFW and the FHEQ, and issues descriptions of levels for all University qualifications.

1.25 The University has a clear scheme and module approval processes, articulated in its Academic Quality Handbook, which require the approval of learning outcomes aligned to the level of award. The Handbook also outlines the process for approval of new or restructured study schemes, through initial approval stages, and then approval through full or internal approval panels as determined by the ADPC.

1.26 The University involves external examiners in the assurance of academic standards through assessment. External examiner report templates require external examiners to comment on whether the University has appropriately set standards for the level of award, and whether the standard is consistent with other UK higher education institutions and with the FHEQ.

1.27 The University has agreed and clearly documented processes for the design and approval of new programmes. These processes include steps that would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.28 The review team tested this Expectation by examining the University's quality assurance policies and procedures, documents, programme approval templates, related guidance, and programme and module specifications. The team also read examples of completed approval documentation, minutes of relevant committees, and external examiners' reports, and held meetings with academic and senior staff.

1.29 A review of a sample of published programme specifications and module information showed appropriate use of Subject Benchmark Statements, and references to the FHEQ and CQFW. Information on the curriculum is entered into the study schemes database, which provides content for publication on the University's website.

1.30 Staff demonstrated awareness of appropriate threshold standards and engagement with academic standards through the quality assurance, module and programme and validation processes. A sample of completed validation documents confirm this engagement.

1.31   A review of a sample of external examiner reports confirm the appropriateness of standards and their comparability with the rest of the sector.

1.32   The University has in place an effective process for approving awards and confirming that academic standards are set at an appropriate level. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A3.2): Degree-awarding bodies ensure that credit and qualifications are awarded only where:

- **the achievement of relevant learning outcomes (module learning outcomes in the case of credit and programme outcomes in the case of qualifications) has been demonstrated through assessment**
- **both UK threshold standards and their own academic standards have been satisfied.**

Quality Code, *Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards*

Findings

1.33   The Academic Quality Handbook articulates the purposes and principles of assessment, including guidance on the volume of assessment, and provides the academic framework for the assessment of both taught and research degrees. Programme specifications describe how the University uses assessment to determine achievement of programme-level intended learning outcomes. At module level, learning outcomes link to particular assessment methods. Assessment regulations describe processes for internal moderation and second-marking, and a two-tier exam system, comprising institute/department exam boards, followed by Senate exam boards, which allow for the moderation and scrutiny of marks. External examiners also contribute to the verification of assessment.

1.34   Scheme approval and review processes require all programmes to have clearly defined learning outcomes. The module approval process checks the appropriateness of assessment to test the achievement of learning outcomes related to the level of study and UK and threshold academic standards. The scheme approval documentation maps modules against programme level learning outcomes. Approval documentation for bachelor's degrees with honours does not always define specific intermediate or exit awards. However, the University has generic exit awards with programme-level learning outcomes specified in the criteria for the award of degrees, diplomas and certificates for those students who accumulate sufficient credit but exit without a bachelor's degree.

1.35   The process of scheme approval, and regulations governing assessment, would enable the Expectation to be met. To test the Expectation the review team questioned academic staff, institute heads and heads of department, and undergraduate and postgraduate students. Documentary evidence considered included the Academic Quality Handbook, programme specifications, approval documentation, minutes of relevant committees and assessment, and research regulations.

1.36   University scheme approval and review panels scrutinise the appropriateness of intended learning outcomes and confirm that they are tested through the assessment process and the appropriateness of the assessment strategy. Panels also confirm that all modules are mapped against the programme-level learning outcomes so that the achievement of all relevant learning outcomes can be demonstrated through assessment at modular level.

1.37   The University website provides detailed module information for all programmes that states the intended programme learning outcomes and includes details of assessment tasks. Relevant handbooks and documentation direct staff and students to this online database. Students who met the review team were clear about the nature and purpose of their assessments. The University's academic framework provides an effective system for the assessment of learning outcomes, which is clearly understood by staff and students.

1.38   Departments follow a standard template to record examination minutes, to ensure due consideration of individual student marks and module mark profiles. Moderation takes place internally unless modules contribute to the final award, in which instance an external examiner will also monitor the marking standards to check the effective conduct of internal moderation. Examination boards follow the examinations conventions and the regulations and standing orders governing the conduct of examinations.

1.39   The regulations for the submission and examination of research theses detail effective assessment procedures for research students, while the Academic Quality Handbook sets out the criteria for awarding research degrees with reference to the relevant FHEQ descriptors for Level 7 and 8 awards. The RDC reports to the Academic Board and considers reports on the outcome of assessment undertaken during the year for all postgraduate research students.

1.40   Approval and review processes are sufficient to test the appropriateness of academic standards and that the achievement of relevant learning outcomes is demonstrated through assessment. The University's assessment procedures are effective in determining the award of credit and qualifications. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A3.3): Degree-awarding bodies ensure that processes for the monitoring and review of programmes are implemented which explicitly address whether the UK threshold academic standards are achieved and whether the academic standards required by the individual degree-awarding body are being maintained.

Quality Code, *Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards*

Findings

1.41   The University has a process for the Annual Monitoring of Taught Schemes (AMTS) with responsibility for each scheme resting with the relevant institute. Those involved received templates and guidance documentation for the process. Governance of annual monitoring remains with the QAC at University level. The University has arrangements to monitor research degrees on an annual basis through programme supervisors.

1.42   Staff for each scheme or a suite of schemes submit completed annual monitoring forms to their institute, which then compiles a summary institute annual monitoring report to the QAC. Annual monitoring requires programme staff to report on actions since last year, quality indicators, evaluation and feedback from students and staff, feedback from external examiners and accrediting bodies, enhancement, good practice and any changes to the programme specification; it also requires an action plan. The University provides data packs for the top 40 recruiting programmes to inform their annual monitoring report. The range of monitoring data that supports the process includes external examiners' confirmation of standards, and position against benchmark data. External examiner report templates prompt external examiners to comment specifically on the comparability of standards and the programmes' alignment with external reference points.

1.43   The University had a process for periodic review, which, under its revised structure, it has replaced with Institute and Department Performance Audits (IDPA). The Academic Quality Handbook provides details of the process, specifying that an audit team, including external subject experts, visits departments and then conducts a follow-up visit to the institute, to look at 'management, learning, teaching, enhancement, and quality assurance procedures, and monitoring against KPIs'. This is not a revalidation process and the University is piloting a programme-level periodic review. These processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.44   The review team evaluated the University's approach to the Expectation by considering the policies and procedures for programme review, including documentation such as annual monitoring forms, IDPAs, minutes of committees and external examiner reports. It held meetings with a range of staff and students to discuss their involvement in the annual, periodic and departmental reviews.

1.45   In considering programme review documentation the review team found that the University confirms academic standards effectively through the annual, departmental and periodic review processes.

1.46   The review team found that external examiners' reports comment specifically on comparability of standards and alignment with external reference points. These reports are used and referenced in the monitoring and review processes.

1.47   The review team noted that the IDPA process does not involve direct revalidation of programmes. The University is currently piloting a periodic review process in one

programme - Sport and Exercise Science - and intends to implement a system during 2016-17.

1.48   The procedures for reviewing and monitoring standards are appropriate and managed effectively. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A3.4): In order to be transparent and publicly accountable, degree-awarding bodies use external and independent expertise at key stages of setting and maintaining academic standards to advise on whether:

- **UK threshold academic standards are set, delivered and achieved**
- **the academic standards of the degree-awarding body are appropriately set and maintained.**

Quality Code, *Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards*

Findings

1.49   Each scheme approval requires external input during development from an external examiner, departmental external advisers, or representatives of professional or accrediting bodies. A full scheme approval panel, chaired by a senior academic from a different institute, requires an external assessor. The external assessor is expected to comment on standards and may be asked to complete a written report prior to the event. An internal scheme approval panel may require an external assessor as determined by the ADPC if a major change requires a significant departure from the aims and learning outcomes of the existing scheme. The external assessor must either have appropriate academic experience with the relevant subject or relevant professional expertise, be independent of the University and must not have had involvement in the development of the programmes, in accordance with guidance laid down in the Academic Quality Handbook. During the initial approval process the procedure states that institutes must comment on whether they will seek PSRB accreditation as part of the scheme approval process or whether they will seek accreditation subsequently.

1.50   The University's Academic Quality Handbook describes the PSRB accreditation procedure. The Academic Board maintains a register of all PSRB-accredited programmes, receives reports from institutes about any accreditation exercise undertaken, and considers all reports arising from accreditation exercises. Annual monitoring also requires a reflective commentary on any PSRB-related issues for accredited programmes.

1.51   The QAC oversees the appointment of external examiners and ensures that all external examiners receive responses to their reports. External examiners appointed to oversee taught awards supplement the work of internal examiners in confirming that the University adheres to its own published standards, and that these are comparable with standards elsewhere in the higher education sector and with threshold standards in the UK. Separate external examiners are appointed for Welsh and English medium provision within departments as determined by the language of assessment.

1.52   The process of using external and independent expertise when setting and maintaining academic standards would allow the Expectation to be met. The review team tested the Expectation by questioning staff during meetings and by reviewing evidence provided by the University.

1.53   In practice, the University has an appropriate system of using external and independent expertise. The evidence provided demonstrated that the University adheres to the processes laid down in the Academic Quality Handbook. The University does not routinely require independent industrial input, although external assessors provide thorough scrutiny, which can entail the production of a report prior to the convening of a full scheme approval panel. Internal scheme approval events also require external consultation, although this can be from a current external examiner. In such circumstances approval panels require evidence of this consultation as part of the approval process.

1.54   Academic Board oversight includes PSRB issues, which are adequately considered; the annual monitoring process also monitors ongoing engagement with PSRBs effectively. The QAC is effective in ensuring that external examiners are appointed in accordance with published procedures and that examiners produce their reports in a timely manner. These reports and departmental responses form an integral part of the annual monitoring process.

1.55   The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low, as the process of using external and independent expertise when setting and maintaining academic standards is adequately defined, with an appropriate system of scheme approval panel and University committee oversight.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards: Summary of findings

1.56 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the Higher Education Review: Wales Handbook.

1.57 The University has met all of the Expectations of this judgement area, and the level of risk for each Expectation is low. The review team makes no recommendations in relation to this judgement area and identified no affirmations or features of good practice.

1.58 The review team concludes that the setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards at the University **meet** UK expectations.

2   Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

Expectation (B1): Higher education providers, in discharging their responsibilities for setting and maintaining academic standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, operate effective processes for the design, development and approval of programmes.

Quality Code, Chapter B1: Programme Design, Development and Approval

Findings

2.1   The Academic Board governs and oversees the University's quality framework, with responsibilities delegated to two subcommittees: the QAC is responsible for programme approval and review, and the ADPC is responsible for maintaining an overview of new schemes, suspensions and withdrawals.

2.2   The University has a clear scheme and module approval process detailed in the Academic Quality Handbook, which outlines the process for approval of new or restructured modules and study schemes, through initial approval stages, and then approval through full or internal approval panels as determined by the ADPC. The University provides guidance information and templates for these processes. The Scheme Approval Form requires panels to confirm the receipt of relevant programme documentation, including evidence of external consultation. External assessors may submit an external assessor report.

2.3   QAC monitors the module approval process, but it is the institute's Learning and Teaching Committees (LTCs) that are responsible for approving new and restructured modules, approving minor changes to modules and the suspension and withdrawal of modules, supported by guidance and templates for module approval, change and withdrawal. The AQRO maintains records of any module changes and final versions in a secure format.

2.4   In principle, there are clear programme and module approval, change and approval processes that would enable this Expectation to be met. The team reviewed the operation of the University's design and approval procedures through consideration of module and scheme approval documents and evidence related to the modifications process, and through meetings with relevant staff.

2.5   The review team saw evidence of the detailed approval process for some recently approved degrees. ADPC and QAC minutes, and samples of minutes and reports of approval panels, show appropriate consideration of initial proposals and programme approval reports, and evidence was provided of the module approval process from department to institute-level committees. The team found evidence of independent scrutiny in the process for minor changes to modules; staff met by the team were fully aware of the approval and modification processes.

2.6   The review team noted that students engage with the approval process through membership of department and institute-level LTCs and informal feedback on courses. There is no direct student involvement in validation or approval panels. This finding supports the recommendation under Expectation B5.

2.7   The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B2): Recruitment, selection and admission policies and procedures adhere to the principles of fair admission. They are transparent, reliable, valid, inclusive and underpinned by appropriate organisational structures and processes. They support higher education providers in the selection of students who are able to complete their programme.
Quality Code, *Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education*

Findings

2.8 The University has a centralised admissions process for the majority of taught programmes that makes judgements against published entry criteria. There are some exceptions to this, with the Department of Welsh and Celtic Studies, the School of Art, and the Institute of Biological, Environmental and Rural Sciences (IBERS) making decisions on undergraduate applications. From the 2016-17 applications, cycle decisions on applicants to IBERS will also be made centrally. Similarly, there are some exceptions to this at taught postgraduate level.

2.9 The University considers each application on an individual basis and has a policy governing the admission of disabled students and those with specific learning differences, in line with its widening access policy. From 2016-17 the University will use contextual data to further ensure fair access.

2.10 The University has an admissions policy statement and produces guides for admissions tutors. Successful applicants receive information that details applicant visiting days, accommodation, finances and international exchange opportunities.

2.11 The Academic Board has oversight of admissions processes through designated subcommittees, and approved the University's recent change to make offers using subject qualifications and grades, instead of tariff points. The Recruitment and Marketing Committee is responsible for developing, reviewing and revising recruitment and marketing strategies, as well as for the associated policies and procedures. It receives regular updates on a number of areas, including recruitment, admissions, scholarships and bursaries. Its terms of reference include a representative from the Students' Union. Its work is supplemented by a Recruitment Action Group, which meets fortnightly to develop strategies to meet these targets, and a Welcome Week Action Group that confirms, oversees and monitors all induction arrangements for new students.

2.12 Information for students makes clear that they cannot appeal applications decisions, and there is an accessible complaints procedure for recruitment and admissions. The University is reviewing is complaints procedure for applicants ahead of the 2016-17 application cycle.

2.13 The policies and procedures developed by the University in this area would allow the Expectation to be met. The review team examined this Expectation in meetings with students, institute directors and heads of departments, students, academic staff, professional support staff, and staff and students from the Mauritius campus. It also examined the documentation, including that which details applications procedures and communication with students, and documents that relate to the management and oversight of the recruitment processes.

2.14 The review team considered the University's approach to widening participation and inclusive admissions, including the reports written by the Centre for Widening Participation and Social Inclusion and the Annual Equality Report and policy reviews, as well as meeting with professional support staff. The team also met undergraduate and graduate students,

including student representatives and postgraduate research students. The review team found a range of activities during induction and admission for students with additional learning needs. These include a two-day acclimatisation programme for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder prior to freshers' week, and the development of an app that promotes accessibility information. This illustrates the University's commitment to inclusivity. The University also provides personalised admissions feedback to each successful applicant, demonstrating individualised support. The pre-enrolment process and personalised support for students, including those with specific learning needs, which facilitates their entry to the University, is **good practice**.

2.15   The review team examined information about the University's approach to widening participation and found that the University's approach to providing an inclusive admissions process was robust. For example, the University runs a Summer University to target widening access groups. This six-week residential programme, with around 90 participants per year, gives prospective students an insight into higher education, prepares pupils for student life, and helps to build students' confidence. The University also operates an Expanding Horizons scheme in schools to support attainment in Maths and English. The Recruitment and Marketing Committee is responsible for monitoring the targets related to widening participation.

2.16   Students based at the University's campus in Mauritius were positive about their experience of the admissions process. Most had received information about the University through outreach activities, both at school level and at admissions fairs. Staff confirmed that the University's central administration reviews all applicants to programmes in Mauritius in the same way as for other Aberystwyth programmes. Prospective students receive information about the University and their programmes through a dedicated Mauritius prospectus, which details overall course aims, employability skills attainable from programmes, and programme fees. Successful candidates receive further information through offer letters.

2.17   Postgraduate research students were also largely positive in their reflections on the applications and admissions process. Students met by the review team had been in contact with their supervisor prior to admission, with interviews conducted both in person and by video conference. Student experiences of induction had varied according to the time of year that they commenced their studies. The University hosts induction sessions for postgraduate research students twice a year.

2.18   The University enables students to declare protected characteristics and additional learning needs at admissions stage. The University's policy on the admission of disabled students and those with specific learning needs commits the University to a principle of broadening participation and assessing all applications on an individual basis. The University provides named Accessibility Advisers within its Student Support Services to support students with learning needs during the application and admission process.

2.19   The University has effective and fair policies and procedures for the recruitment, selection and admission of students. The University provides support to students and considers their needs throughout the application and enrolment process. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B3): Higher education providers, working with their staff, students and other stakeholders, articulate and systematically review and enhance the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices, so that every student is enabled to develop as an independent learner, study their chosen subject(s) in depth and enhance their capacity for analytical, critical and creative thinking.

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*

Findings

2.20   The University's approach to learning and teaching is set out in its 2012-17 Learning and Teaching Strategy, which it updated at the start of the 2015-16 academic year. The Strategy, approved by the Academic Board, commits to improving student learning opportunities and intends to help address Aim 1, 'Creating Opportunities', and Aim 3, 'Teaching that Inspires', of the University's Strategic Plan.

2.21   The Learning and Teaching Strategy's three key themes are enriching the student experience, graduate skills and employability, and widening access. The LTEC oversees the Student Success Plan (SSP), produced to operationalise the Learning and Teaching Strategy, and will review it annually. The Pro Vice-Chancellor for Learning and Teaching has overall oversight of both the Learning and Teaching Strategy and SSP. Themes of the SSP are embedded into work strands for implementation. University committees receive reports on each theme, and the planning department has a coordinating and monitoring role to ensure that the work strands make progress. Work strands and initiatives that support the Strategy can be short or long term; they seek to enhance the student experience, and through that the National Student Survey (NSS) results and the University's reputation.

2.22   In support of its Learning and Teaching Strategy the University has recently invested in the refurbishment of teaching spaces and works to enhance the employability of its students with the initiatives Aber Temps and Aber Forward, which provide structured work experiences for students and graduates. Campus developments include the reopening of the Llanbadarn campus as the Llanbadarn Centre, the opening of a new postgraduate centre on the Penglais Campus, and a planned future refurbishment of the Old College building to provide further postgraduate space. In 2014, the University also launched the Academi Aber Academy to promote the creation of media-rich educational resources and to encourage ideas to enhance learning, teaching and pedagogy.

2.23   The University reformed the Aberystwyth Learning and Teaching Online group into the Technology Enhanced Learning Group (TELG) in 2014. The TELG reports to the LTEC and has a remit to oversee the application of new technologies in the University and drive development of the virtual learning environment (VLE). For example, the TELG introduced required minimum presence and enhanced presence guidelines for modules on the VLE. Representation on the TELG includes institutes, relevant support staff and students, and each institute produces a TELG action plan focused on the enhancement of teaching and learning through the use of technology for the programmes they deliver. The University publishes current and historic information on technology-enhanced learning activities on the University's NEXUS website.

2.24   Institute TELG action plans actively promote the use of software to record lectures (lecture capture), available in all of the University's central teaching rooms. The SSP plans for the mandatory use of lecture capture for all teaching delivered in lecture theatres from September 2016. Further technology developments include the recent introduction of the software for managing and sharing reading lists, an investment in timetabling software that

has enabled students to access personal timetables on multiple devices, and a subscription to a further online library in response to student feedback.

2.25   Students submit coursework prepared in electronic format through text matching software, which assists in the detection of possible unacceptable academic practice. A project group that forms a strand of the SSP oversees the e-submission policy and is working to increase the uptake of e-marking and e-feedback.

2.26   The Centre for the Development of Staff and Academic Practice (CDSAP) provides a Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching in Higher Education (PGCTHE): a mandatory course for all new staff with teaching responsibilities and less than three years of experience teaching in higher education. It consists of two 30-credit master's-level modules: the first accredited by the Higher Education Academy (HEA) at Associate Fellow level, the second at Fellowship level. The University has met a target in its Strategic Plan for 60 per cent of all full-time staff who teach to have HEA Fellowship status, or higher, by 2017.

2.27   Upon induction postgraduate research students attend a centrally provided introductory session on teaching, after which their host department provides further support. Postgraduate research students also have the option to complete the first module of the PGCTHE or to progress further to the full certificate in order to gain HEA Associate Fellow or Fellow status. Those who do not, but who have nevertheless accumulated significant teaching experience, can also apply for Associate Fellow or Fellowship of the HEA in a similar manner to other University staff.

2.28   The University runs a peer observation of teaching programmes across all departments, and expects all teaching staff to have their practice observed and to observe others.

2.29   To assist in their academic development every undergraduate student is allocated a personal tutor, with Welsh-speaking students assigned Welsh-speaking tutors where possible. In addition, to ensure that students have an equal and effective opportunity to access their learning, Student Support Services provides services for disabled students and those with additional learning needs. It aims to make the University's academic facilities available to all who study and its support includes a specialist mentoring scheme for disabled students.

2.30   The University collects and analyses a range of information that can influence learning opportunities and teaching practice. This includes an annual Information Services Users' Survey, the results of which are published online. It covers all library and IT services, comparing the data received in order to identify trends and plan services. Student Support Services also produce an annual report that reflects upon their service provision. The University has also introduced a Tell Us Now mid-module survey that provides an additional route for receiving feedback and responding to issues in year.

2.31   These approaches, working with a range of stakeholders to review and enhance the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices, would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.32   The review team tested the Expectation by reviewing evidence provided by the University, including the student submission to this report and website information, and by meeting with and questioning students and academic and support staff.

2.33   The University uses the SSP as a method of operationalising the Learning and Teaching Strategy. It has set up 16 working parties, which are all focused on the SSP work strands.

2.34   The TELG has an active role in driving technology implementation across the University. Institute action plans provide a broad picture of an early phase of implementation, with intentions to increase the number of VLE modules achieving the required minimum presence, using e-submission, and to increase engagement with reading list software, lecture capture and the Academi Aber Academy.

2.35   Students who met the review team confirmed that there are still some modules and, in some subject areas, groups of modules that have failed to achieve the VLE required minimum presence. In contrast, departments have rapidly adopted the new reading list software, with the benefits widely recognised by staff and students. The subscription to a further online library gives staff and students access to existing printed book stock in electronic format, and access to additional and previously unavailable items.

2.36   In response to the Learning and Teaching Strategy and the TELG action plans, the uptake of lecture capture has increased significantly from 853 sessions in 2012-13 to 3,841 in 2015-16. While staff have widely adopted the e-submission process, there remain issues regarding the use of, and student access to, text matching software to assist in the detection of unacceptable academic practice and the availability of the software interface through the medium of Welsh (see paragraph 2.79). The review team noted that full VLE system and e-submission access was available to students in Mauritius, who benefitted from many of the other online systems developed or adopted by the University to promote learning opportunities.

2.37   The CDSAP has actively promoted staff development and engagement with the HEA. The University has already exceeded the target in its Strategic Plan for 60 per cent of all full-time staff who teach to hold fellowship of the HEA or higher by 2017. The CDSAP is also working to develop three additional 20-credit modules to the PGCTHE to enable the award of a diploma with the intention to accredit the modules for the award of Senior Fellow of the HEA. An annual learning and teaching conference showcases good practice, and most of the sessions result from teaching projects carried out by PGCTHE participants. The University benefits from a body of well-qualified staff; the review team heard from students that staff reputation was a factor that influenced their choice of place of study.

2.38   Postgraduate research students have a wide range of study support available, including the Researcher Development Programme introduced to students during induction. In terms of professional development, students, including those postgraduate research students who teach and/or assess, may optionally access the PGCTHE. While an introduction to teaching is part of research student induction, for off-year-start students this induction does not necessarily occur prior to teaching duties. In addition, this introduction does not provide specific training for teaching and assessing. This finding supports the recommendation in paragraph 2.148. Postgraduate research students can attend workshops provided by the CDSAP and may also receive departmental support.

2.39   While the University acknowledged a need to improve monitoring of its peer observation, staff commented that the system is widely implemented. Undergraduate and postgraduate students all have access to a personal tutor, and the Student Support Committee receives progress reports on a Personal Tutor Enhancement Strategy. Undergraduate students met by the review team are positive about the personal tutoring system; postgraduate research students endorsed the effectiveness of their supervisory framework and are supportive of the pastoral support available.

2.40   The annual Information Services Users Survey provides a comprehensive and reflective analysis of service provision and makes survey results available online. Consequently, it can identify and prioritise students' concerns; in addition to an online summary of results, it publishes information about specific changes that result from the

survey as a You Said We Did poster. In comparison to the quantitatively driven Information Services Users' Survey, the most recent Student Support Services annual report is qualitative and information based, and does not use any data that reflects upon access or usage of its services, including those workshops linked to developing an inclusive curriculum.

2.41   The University takes a strategic approach to the development of its learning and teaching. While it is able to measure aspects of the effectiveness of this work - for example, the results of the Information Services Users' Survey and You Said We Did campaign show demonstrable progress in several areas - in other areas such as the Student Support Services the University does not use resource usage and availability data in its evaluations. The review team found that the University enhances the provision of its learning opportunities and teaching practices, but that in several instances this work is developmental, as exemplified by the numerous working groups that remain focused on delivering the SSP.

2.42   The University demonstrates a strategic approach to the development of learning and teaching that it delivers in an environment that is conducive to student learning. Well-qualified staff who can underpin curricula with appropriate subject-specific expertise and extensive engagement with relevant research support this. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B4): Higher education providers have in place, monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential.

Quality Code, *Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement*

Findings

2.43   Responsibility for monitoring and evaluating the University's processes and resources that support student development and achievement rests with the Academic Board. It agreed key deliverables and goals for itself and its subcommittees during 2015-16, for consideration as committee standing business. Many of the goals align to the SSP, with its key themes of enriching the student experience, developing graduate skills and employability, and widening access.

2.44   New students receive an induction to the University that includes information regarding the availability of resources and support arrangements. Postgraduate students, Welsh-speaking students and international students receive tailored inductions. An 'A Team', organised by Student Support Services and the Students' Union, also offers peer support during Welcome Week.

2.45   All undergraduate students are allocated a personal tutor, with Welsh-speaking students assigned Welsh-speaking tutors when possible. The personal tutor role provides integral support for students with personal development planning, and identifying and using the resources and opportunities provided by the University.

2.46   Student Support Services consist of the Wellbeing Service, the Accessibility Service, and the Advice, Information and Money Service. The Wellbeing Service aims to ensure that health and wellbeing is integral to students' everyday life at the University, and the Accessibility Service aims to ensure the availability of academic facilities to all who study at the University. The Advice, Information and Money Service provides information, advice, support and referral on issues including welfare, financial matters and University rules and regulations. Student Support Services produces an annual report for the Student Support Committee that discusses and reflects upon its range of activities.

2.47   The University's Accessibility Service works with disabled students and those with a specific learning need to arrange appropriate adjustments and support, and conducts an annual survey to determine the effectiveness of support. It also supports students in making the most of their attendance at open or visit days, and provides advice and support about the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA). The University has established a working party, reporting to the Student Support Committee, to consider the implications of proposed DSA changes for English-domiciled students. For students ineligible for the DSA the University provides funds from its own budget to ensure that students with learning needs are not disadvantaged, and it works with Bangor University to provide a DSA outreach centre.

2.48   The University's Accessibility Service aims to provide all students with an experience of the highest quality, and to make academic facilities available to all who meet its entrance requirements. For disabled students, those with long-standing health conditions or a specific learning need, the Accessibility Service can put in place a range of adjustments/support such as notetaking, adapted accommodation, enabling technology and individual examinations.

2.49   A new Employability Strategy approved in 2015 prompted a reorganisation of the Careers Service. The Employability Action Group, a subgroup of the LTEC, monitors this Strategy through implementation of Institute Employability Action Plans, which establish set

goals and targets. Complementing this Strategy, the Careers Education Framework aims to embed career management skills into the curriculum through a department-led programme of employability initiatives supported by dedicated careers consultants.

2.50   Information Services recently implemented a new automated attendance monitoring system, and the University has plans for this technology to assist with monitoring student engagement and academic progress.

2.51   Student learning support programmes provide academic skills development for all students on an optional or recommended basis, comprising a series of free courses, modular courses and individual consultations, with associated academic services available from the International English Centre.

2.52   The Centre for Welsh Language Services supports institutes and academic departments to develop modules, courses and projects to ensure that students have a choice of provision and resources when studying through the medium of Welsh. Students may decide to study every module through the medium of Welsh in some departments or choose a bilingual mix of Welsh-medium and English-medium modules in other departments.

2.53   The University provides a wide range of services to enable student development and achievement, which would allow the Expectation to be met. The review team tested the Expectation by reviewing evidence provided by the University and through questioning staff and students.

2.54   The set of 2015-16 Key Deliverables for the Academic Board and its subcommittees are in addition to the standing business of each committee and closely align to the SSP. Subcommittees of the Academic Board had the opportunity to review their 2015-16 targets for student support prior to formal approval of the Key Deliverables list. This list also identifies where the responsibility for targets is located within the academic committee structure. The targets closely align to the Learning and Teaching Strategy and the SSP, and include a focus on student attendance, retention and achievement, and assessment methods. Support for students studying at the Mauritius campus have also been brought into the scope of committees' work. The targets provide an effective framework for monitoring progress and engagement with the SSP at University level.

2.55   The University has been evaluating its induction arrangements through the Welcome Week working party, which uses feedback provided by first-year students during the early weeks of the academic session. Staff take care to ensure that they provide tailored arrangements for the different types of student whom they induct and for the differing needs of the students. New students have access to comprehensive information regarding the welcome programme, and international students benefit from a welcome ceremony and a welcome pack to help them settle into University life.

2.56   A review of personal tutoring arrangements is currently underway and a working party reporting to the Student Support Committee aims to look at measures to enhance student achievement through personal tutors. Students met by the review team were all aware of the personal tutoring system and positive about the support that they received.

2.57   Student Support Services provide an effective range of services through appropriately qualified staff. Students identified that timely access to counselling within the Wellbeing Service could be problematic. The review team learned that staffing resources in this area were under pressure due to recruitment problems, and that there was at the time of the review no access to Welsh-medium counselling services beyond those available from the local authority.

2.58   The Accessibility Service runs two specialist mentoring schemes, one for disabled students and one primarily aimed at supporting students' transition into their first year of study. Both schemes received recognition in 2015 from the Mentoring and Befriending Foundation. The service conducts an annual user survey that provides a very positive reflection of its provision, although it is unclear what further use is made of the data. In particular, the Student Services annual report does not explicitly reflect upon this user data, which contains valuable user feedback including, for example, comments on the cost to students of the dyslexia testing service.

2.59   The DSA changes working party's remit includes considering the implications of proposed DSA changes for English-domiciled students. It focuses on curriculum design to mitigate the effect of these changes, including the introduction of mandatory lecture capture for undergraduate students from September 2016.

2.60   Departments conduct student attendance monitoring. Since the introduction of the swipe card system in September 2015 to record attendance at classes, they now have more data available. A student retention working party leads work to provide a consistent, documented means of monitoring engagement. One key element of the work is highlighting students at risk of withdrawal early in the academic cycle and targeting them for greater pastoral support. A data driven retention update produced in December 2015 demonstrated the system's efficacy in understanding the characteristics of students at risk of withdrawal in its data sets. Further to this work, the Academic Board has consulted on introducing a common attendance policy across the University for 2016-17.

2.61   The University provides an effective set of support services to enable student development and achievement. It has effective processes to ensure it treats students equally and informs them of the services available before and during induction, with further guidance available in handbooks and online. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B5): Higher education providers take deliberate steps to engage all students, individually and collectively, as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience.

Quality Code, *Chapter B5: Student Engagement*

Findings

2.62   The University's Learning and Teaching Strategy considers student representation as vital and the Academic Quality Handbook details arrangements for representation. Students sit on most committees at all levels in the University's committee structure, including at the Academic Board and QAC. The Student Representative and Experience Coordinator trains student representatives and provides ongoing support, including any additional training.

2.63   The University gathers feedback from the student body through the NSS, and the Postgraduate Taught and Research Experience Surveys (PTES and PRES). The NSS results reflect students' satisfaction with their higher education provision, with 86 per cent satisfied with the teaching on their course. Institutes develop action plans in response to NSS scores, detailing the staff responsible and target completion dates. The University discusses NSS results and the associated action plans at the QAC. The University informs staff of the value and importance of student feedback, and the relation between NSS scores and the SSP.

2.64   The University has introduced a Tell Us Now (TUN) initiative, which includes a mid-module survey, and it continues to use online surveys at the end of modules. The University has a You Said, We Did website to communicate the actions it takes in response to students' feedback. The initiative has dedicated resource from two members of staff. Handbooks inform students of the availability of Staff-Student Consultative Committees (SSCCs) within their departments.

2.65   The University has a Student Charter, which lays out the mutual obligations and expectations of the University and its students. Offer letters to successful applicants and induction informs students of the Student Charter.

2.66   These policies and procedures would allow the Expectation to be met. The review team examined this Expectation by meeting with institute directors and heads of department, postgraduate research students, students and staff at the Mauritius campus, academic staff, and professional support staff. It also reviewed the minutes of meetings attended by students relating to the involvement and impact of students.

2.67   Students from the Mauritius campus whom the review team met provide feedback through a range of mechanisms, such as directly to staff and through module reviews. Where there are small programme cohorts, such as at the Mauritius campus, staff invite all students to attend SSCCs, while larger courses appoint student representatives. The Mauritius student handbook informs students of the role of the Students' Union and the SSCCs. Students reported that staff are responsive to their needs, and staff confirmed that they are aware of and addressing students' concerns about transportation and accommodation. The University is supporting the Students' Union engagement with students at the Mauritius campus.

2.68   The TUN initiative has a working group to coordinate its activities and it reports to the LTEC, including through a project report. The University communicates the initiative to students through leaflets and online. Students and staff whom the review team met were positive about the extent to which the scheme had allowed the University to respond to

student feedback with agility. The review team found action plans resulting from TUN feedback to be robust and monitored effectively, and students are informed of the outcomes through the You Said, We Did scheme. Students gave examples of times that the University had responded to student views, with particular emphasis on the impact of TUN: one example was the extension of library opening hours in response to students' needs.

2.69   The Students' Union trains student representatives, who engage with the students they represent and report back to them the outcomes of SSCC meetings. Student representatives have membership of the majority of University working groups, including the TUN working party, the personal tutor enhancement working party, the skills and learning development working party, and the Employability Action Group. In addition, students have membership on University committees, such as the QAC, the Academic Board, the LTEC and the ADPC. However, the University has other working parties related to quality assurance and enhancement without student representation, for example on the HEAR working party, the Welcome Week/Matriculation group, or currently, the enhancement of Welsh-medium provision and experience working party. The review team met students who participate in student engagement at institute level, and who feel that the institutes engage with their views, but the depth of this engagement varies across the University. As it stands, although there is student representation on the Academic Board and many other University-level committees, in practice the University does not enable students to engage as partners in all quality assurance-related activities, including in the design and approval of programmes process and the periodic review of programmes process. The review team **recommends** that the University ensures the systematic involvement of students as partners in programme approval and review, and the enhancement of the student experience.

2.70   The terms of reference of the SSCC were reviewed by the team and found to be robust, giving students a chance to air their views on timetabling issues, employability and academic arrangements. Students with whom the review team met found SSCCs to be an effective mechanism of engagement. The LTC discusses issues and participation in the SSCCs, showing that students' views shared at SSCCs are heard at senior committee level. The Department Quality Audit includes consideration of SSCCs, and the University expects departments to reflect on their SSCCs in their self-evaluation document.

2.71   In view of the range of mechanisms, including TUN and the effective use of the Students' Union in training and preparing student representatives, the review team concludes that the University takes deliberate steps to engage all students, individually and collectively, in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. Notwithstanding this, there is moderate risk to the Expectation being met due to the absence of student engagement in some areas of quality assurance and enhancement. This indicates that although the University has applied its existing quality assurance procedures appropriately, its procedures require revision to ensure that in future it engages students in all aspects of quality assurance and enhancement. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

Expectation (B6): Higher education providers operate equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment, including for the recognition of prior learning, which enable every student to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the credit or qualification being sought.

Quality Code, *Chapter B6: Assessment of Students and the Recognition of Prior Learning*

Findings

2.72   The University Academic Quality Handbook sets out an overview of assessment policies and procedures, complemented by the exam convention and regulatory framework governing both undergraduate and postgraduate taught provision. The Handbook provides guidance on assessing burden/equivalency, giving students feedback within three working weeks, and requires institutes to publish criteria and have policies on double-marking, anonymous marking, moderation and methods of scaling. All students are entitled to be assessed through the medium of Welsh. Policies and procedures govern special circumstances, appeals, and credit accumulation and transfer.

2.73   The University regulations govern its modular system and credits, and the accumulation and transfer of credits to awards. Prospective students may request, as part of their applications to study, that the University takes account of credits they have previously achieved, or their experiential learning.

2.74   Students have access to the Undergraduate Student Examination Handbook and postgraduate taught students receive a Code of Practice for Taught Postgraduates. The University also publishes assessment information within programme specifications and module information available online, and criteria within student handbooks, mapped against the CQFW and FHEQ. Staff inform students of course assessment details through the VLE.

2.75   The University has two-tiered examining boards at Senate and institute level, with recent changes to the number of permitted failed credits involving provision of a more equitable and consistent University-wide approach to the achievement of learning outcomes. Assessment arrangements include the involvement of external examiners through an established system (see Expectation B7).

2.76   The University has clearly established systems, procedures and policies for assessment, which would enable the Expectation to be met. The review team considered key documentation relating to assessment, including regulations, policies and guidance, as well as relevant parts of validation materials, programme handbooks and minutes of meetings relating to assessment and results, and considered external examiners' reports. It met staff responsible for determining strategy and overseeing conduct of assessment, teaching teams, and students.

2.77   The review team confirmed that University-level assessment policies, regulations and processes are explicit, transparent and accessible to all intended audiences. The University carries out assessment securely, and the clear and functional two-tier exam board system explicitly and effectively involves the AQRO, which has oversight of assessment regulations and practice. The Annual Monitoring Scheme demonstrates that programme teams reflect on awards, progression and retention.

2.78   The University provides further accurate assessment information through departmental handbooks, although there is no consistent template or format of assessment information. The review team found inconsistency in the information and practice related to

appeals across departments, which risks the equitability of processes related to assessment. This relates to the recommendation under Expectation B9.

2.79   The Student Success Plan's themes include assessment and feedback, and the University has set a working group to implement e-submission and e-feedback. Students whom the review team met confirmed that they have no significant concerns around the volume, bunching or timing of assessment. Students noted the progress made in addressing their concerns on assessment and feedback, including the introduction of policy on late submissions, the need to provide feedback to students within three weeks, and the move to e-submission. The team found that Welsh-medium students can use the University's text matching software but that the interface is currently unavailable in Welsh.

2.80   Staff and students are aware of the recognition of prior learning process. Staff and students described the activities that inform students to help them to avoid Unacceptable Academic Practice (UAP), and staff report instances to the relevant exam boards. The Academic Quality Handbook contains a policy on UAP, reviewed in 2014-15 with a redefinition of UAP. The University has found an increase in reports of UAP in 2014-15 in light of a revised UAP system.

2.81   The CDSAP provides a mandatory course for all new staff with teaching and assessment responsibilities and less than three years of experience teaching in higher education: the Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching in Higher Education (PGCTHE). The University's continuing professional development scheme also provides additional training/support, such as assessing groups. There is no current requirement for postgraduate research students who assess to have any formal training for assessment. This finding supports the recommendation under Expectation B11.

2.82   The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low, because the risk to equitability represented by a few inconsistencies in arrangements for student appeals represents a need to amend or update details in documentation, where the amendment will not require or result in major structural or procedural change.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B7): Higher education providers make scrupulous use of external examiners.

Quality Code, *Chapter B7: External Examining*

Findings

2.83   The Academic Quality Handbook describes the criteria for, and role of, external examiners, and benchmarks these against the Quality Code. The University appoints external examiners for all taught awards and requires them to submit annual reports to the University. The QAC approves nominations and extensions for external examiners on taught schemes.

2.84   The University offers external examiners induction through an annual briefing day, at which examiners also spend time with staff in academic departments to discuss the programmes and modules that they will oversee. Induction also provides information about the University's VLE, through which examiners may need to access students' assessed work and moderators' comments.

2.85   External examiners for taught programmes submit their reports within four weeks of June and December departmental or institute examination boards. The AQRO receives these reports and a two-stage process follows, involving firstly a departmental response to issues raised, followed by a formal response that includes common themes that may have emerged from the collation of reports. External examiner reports and responses to them directly inform the annual monitoring process. Student representatives are active members of the committees that receive reports and consider responses.

2.86   External examiners for research degrees, along with the internal examiners, make judgements about the standard of the work of individual candidates. Such external examiners receive the relevant University regulations, including the Code of Practice for External Examiners for Research Degrees (which will be replaced by Section 6 of the Academic Quality Handbook), notes for external and internal examiners, and the appropriate examination result and report forms. The Head of the Graduate School has responsibility for ensuring that the nominees for external examiners of research degrees meet the required criteria, including that they possess specialist knowledge and expertise in the subject of the research and that they have experience of supervising or examining PhD students.

2.87   The University shares the names and institutions of all external examiners on taught schemes with students through departmental web pages; their reports and departmental response are also made available to students through the VLE.

2.88   The system of external examining and its oversight would allow the Expectation to be met. The review team reviewed evidence provided by the University, including the Academic Quality Handbook, external examiner reports, scheme approval documentation and minutes from relevant committees. Staff and students questioned during formal meetings included teaching staff and link tutors, heads of institutes and departments, and students studying both taught and research programmes.

2.89   The University has effective processes for appointing external examiners for taught programmes and it has recently made changes to improve timeliness further. As such, the QAC confirms all external examiner appointments for each academic year in the preceding May. The University provides a well-organised induction day, and a thorough briefing on the University and its processes and regulations to new external examiners. Feedback from examiners highlights the value of the training provided.

2.90   The University has benchmarked report pro formas against the Quality Code, and a clear flow chart of the quality assurance processes for annual monitoring of taught schemes and external examiner reports demonstrates clearly the dependencies between reporting and monitoring.

2.91   The two-stage process for responding to external examiners includes institute-level consideration of report responses from its departments. The first stage enables institutes to ensure swift response to matters raised, over which it has immediate authority. Each institute then prepares and considers summaries of the reports before submitting a paper to the QAC. At the second stage the QAC considers the institute summary papers and identifies further actions required before producing a summary of findings for the Academic Board. This highlights themes and issues raised in the reports. The process is effective in enabling the QAC to ensure that all points raised by external examiners are addressed at departmental level or University level.

2.92   The second stage of the process for responding to external examiners results in a covering letter from the Pro Vice-Chancellor, with minutes of the relevant QAC and Academic Board meeting that considered institute report summaries. In this way, the University keeps external examiners informed of themes emerging from reports from across the University, and effectively highlights the significance of their role to the University.

2.93   The system for appointing, inducting and working with external examiners for taught programmes and research degrees is effective and robust. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B8): Higher education providers, in discharging their responsibilities for setting and maintaining academic standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, operate effective, regular and systematic processes for monitoring and for review of programmes.

Quality Code, *Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review*

Findings

2.94   As detailed under Expectation A3.3 the University has articulated a set of principles governing the Annual Monitoring of Taught Schemes (AMTS) and more recently developed Institute and Department Performance Audits (IDPAs) to replace Department Reviews, conducted in the previous faculty structure. The QAC has oversight of programme review, as does each institute's LTC. AMTS provides a mechanism to ensure that the aims of programmes are met and to identify good practice, while IDPAs considers institutes' management, learning, teaching, quality assurance, enhancement and targets.

2.95   Documentation issued annually to institutes, and made available on the AQRO web pages and in the Academic Quality Handbook, sets out the processes, roles and responsibilities for AMTS.

2.96   For the annual review of each programme, or a suite of programmes, the University requires programmes to reflect on actions since last year, quality indicators, evaluation and feedback from students and staff, external views (from external examiners and accreditation bodies), enhancement and good practice, and on any changes to programme specifications. It also requires annual reviews to result in action plans. The University has reviewed the first cycle of annual monitoring since the introduction of the Institute structure, at the QAC in autumn 2014, with issues such as timing of completion of AMTS at department and institute level emerging, and examples of insufficient evidence. The QAC also identified resolutions to these issues. The University has also recently piloted a periodic review process at programme level in 2015 for introduction across the University in 2016-17.

2.97   IDPAs involve an audit team, including subject experts and an external academic assessor, visiting departments and then institutes to evaluate practice. Students can participate by preparing a departmental student submission and will participate through the audit visit itself.

2.98   The University has a number of programmes accredited by PSRBs, and it reports on the outcomes from the PSRB activity to the Academic Board.

2.99   The design of annual departmental and institutional reviews would allow the Expectation to be met. The review team reviewed the Academic Quality Handbook, the guidance and templates provided for the review procedures, samples of completed annual reviews, IDPAs and the pilot periodic review documentation. The team also read other review reports and relevant committee minutes, and held meetings with staff and students involved in review procedures.

2.100   Samples of completed AMTS reports and IDPAs show full engagement with the processes and the principle of review, with examination of student satisfaction, attainment and overall programme quality. Minutes from relevant committees provide evidence of them appropriately exercising oversight of the annual review and IDPA processes. Staff who met the review team are fully aware of the procedures for review, and for the processes and criteria for minor/major modifications and programme withdrawal.

2.101   The review team noted that students engage with the review processes through membership of department and institute-level LTCs, and informal feedback on courses. There is no direct student involvement in annual or periodic review panels. This finding supports the recommendation under Expectation B5.

2.102   Prior to the introduction of IDPA the University operated a programme periodic review system within its faculty structure. In 2015-16 the University reintroduced the periodic review process to complement IDPA and to provide greater scrutiny of each programme, piloting the review for the Sport and Exercise Science programme. This acknowledges the potential gap of detailed programme-level review across the University. The University therefore plans to roll out this process across the University for 2016-17. The review team **affirms** the steps being taken to implement formal periodic review processes at programme level.

2.103   The review team concludes that the Expectation is met. The University's procedures and practice are clearly documented and accurately applied. The team affirms the action being taken to re-establish programme periodic review, as this represents completion of activity that will allow the University to meet the Expectation more fully. As such, the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B9): Higher education providers have procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints about the quality of learning opportunities; these procedures are fair, accessible and timely, and enable enhancement.

Quality Code, *Chapter B9: Academic Appeals and Student Complaints*

Findings

2.104   The University makes information about complaints and appeals available to students online and through student handbooks, and information for students at the Mauritius campus is available in the Mauritius students' handbook. The University seeks to resolve complaints in a timely and informal way, directing students to raise the issue first, where appropriate, with their tutor, department or member of academic staff. Students can direct non-academic complaints to the facility or service in question. The University expects staff to resolve informal complaints within 10 working days, and to keep records of the informal complaint and outcome. At the formal complaints stage students complete a complaint form, which directs them to sources of support. Upon receipt of formal complaints a head, or director, of the relevant department arranges interviews with the parties concerned and consults evidence before writing a report for the AQRO. The University intends to resolve complaints within six working weeks, and if students remain dissatisfied, they may request a review by a Pro Vice-Chancellor.

2.105   The AQRO reports on student complaints and appeals to the Academic Board, which is remitted to monitor complaints and appeals data, review the procedures and their effectiveness, and make appropriate recommendations. The University has a strong track record in having its decisions upheld by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA).

2.106   The University has separate arrangements for complaints about admissions and recruitment. Prospective students may contact the Director of the AQRO, who responds within five working days. If students remain dissatisfied they may contact a Pro Vice-Chancellor.

2.107   The University provides information about appeals on its website. Upon receiving an appeal an AQRO assistant registrar verifies the facts with the relevant department before convening an appeal panel comprising four people, including a representative of the Students' Union. The University informs students of panel outcomes within five working days, with appeals taking no longer than six weeks. If students remain dissatisfied they can request a further investigation by a Pro Vice-Chancellor.

2.108   The University has an academic appeals procedure that applies specifically to postgraduate research students, articulated to students online and through the supervisors' handbook. Student can make appeals in writing to the AQRO, which in turn asks the relevant department to verify the facts before it convenes an appeal panel. Students dissatisfied with the panel's decisions may refer their appeal to a Pro Vice-Chancellor for a final review. If students remain dissatisfied, they may refer their appeal to the OIA.

2.109   The availability and design of these processes would allow the Expectation to be met. The review team tested this Expectation in meetings with institute directors and heads of department, academic staff, professional support staff and students, and evaluated documents including the University's academic complaints and appeals procedures, minutes of committees that oversee student complaints and appeal processes, and student handbooks.

2.110   Students met by the review team were confident that they could access information on complaints and appeals should they need it. Academic staff met by the team demonstrated familiarity with the University's complaints and appeals procedures, and make students aware of it at induction and through their positions as personal tutors. Staff confirmed that when they resolve informal complaints they record the details and report on them at departmental meetings.

2.111   The review team asked for sample records of student complaints and appeals and found that the University had handled cases in a timely and effective manner. Minutes of the Academic Board show that it considers issues related to complaints and appeals. The team reviewed the appeals report produced for the RDC and found that the one appeal it covered had been handled in line with the University's regulations.

2.112   The review team heard in meetings that some departments offer students the opportunity to make an informal appeal to the department prior to launching an appeal through the University's procedures. The team found information in some student handbooks that students are entitled to lodge a formal complaint or appeal with their department if they feel that a mark has not been awarded fairly, and which may result in the mark being changed. The University does not provide all students with this opportunity, or make them aware of it, in other school or departmental handbooks and this inconsistency in information supports the recommendation under Section 3 of this report. The review team **recommends** that the University ensures that a consistent approach to academic appeals is practised within and across institutes.

2.113   The University has adequate policies that underpin the complaints and appeals procedures, and effective systems in place for making students aware of the routes for resolution available to them, and for monitoring the effectiveness of such procedures. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met. The recommendation regarding the inconsistent opportunities provided to students appealing their marks represents only a moderate level of associated risk, as the problem is confined to a small part of the University's provision.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

Expectation (B10): Degree-awarding bodies take ultimate responsibility for academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities, irrespective of where these are delivered or who provides them. Arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with organisations other than the degree-awarding body are implemented securely and managed effectively.

Quality Code, *Chapter B10: Managing Higher Education Provision with Others*

Findings

2.114   The University's Strategic Plan 2012-17 aims to develop more academic partnerships, both within the UK and overseas, and the Learning and Teaching Strategy 2012-17 incorporates the theme of internationalisation. The University currently has a relatively small number of active partnerships, and the collaborative provision register details 12 articulation agreements with international institutions and one with the Open University. At present, there are no joint, double or dual degrees in operation.

2.115   The University's policies and procedures governing collaborative provision are set out in the Academic Quality Handbook. The ICPC, which reports to the Academic Board, approves any updates to processes, procedures and information related to collaborative provision. The University is working to provide a collated set of information on collaborative provision programmes available online for staff, prospective partners, existing partners and students.

2.116   The first stage of the collaborative approval involves the completion of an application for approval at institute level. A checklist assists institutes in completing the required documentation, which includes specifying how a proposal fits with the institute's and the University's Strategic Plan. The University requires completed risk assessment forms for partnerships involving franchise, joint degrees and validation as part of the due diligence process. The new partner approval process requires ICPC and Academic Board approval before the University signs a memorandum of agreement. The University has a separate procedure to terminate partnerships.

2.117   For taught programmes that lead to an award of credit by the University, partners follow the University's policies and procedures relating to assessment. The University retains responsibility for approving, and in some cases providing, appropriately qualified staff to deliver or support a collaborative programme. Depending on the nature of the agreement, joint programme boards that report to the ICPC may oversee the partnership. The University has introduced Partner Performance Evaluation to assure the governance and general suitability of partners engaged in delivering franchised or validated programmes or branch campus activities.

2.118   The University established an International Forum to facilitate its internationalisation plan, with representatives from each institute, chaired by the Director of the International Office. The Forum discusses existing and potential activity in each market, and shares market intelligence and best practice for a coordinated approach to the University's internationalisation plans.

2.119   The University has sole authority for issuing certificates and transcripts relating to programmes of study delivered through collaborative partners. The University provides guidance to staff on the required information to include on certificates and transcripts for collaborative programmes.

2.120   Institutes manage arrangements for assuring the quality of learning opportunities delivered by placement hosts, which they approve in the first instance during module and

programme approval processes and monitor through the AMTS process. Separately, the ICPC has a role in approving student exchange proposals based on exchanges justification forms. The Careers Service has a Placement and Employer Engagement Team, which supports institutes in establishing placements.

2.121   The above arrangements for working with other organisations would allow the Expectation to be met. In considering this Expectation the review team examined relevant documentation, including strategies, the guidance for the approval, monitoring and review of collaborative provision, and the minutes of committees that receive reports on partners, and approve course and partnerships. The review team also held discussions with a selection of University staff, and students and staff from the Mauritius campus.

2.122   The University's current UK partnerships include the delivery of a secondary Postgraduate Certificate of Education, under the aegis of the North and Mid-Wales Centre for Teacher Education, in collaboration with Bangor University. This programme is subject to inspection by Estyn. The University also works closely with the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol in the development of Welsh-medium provision. The University has developed a franchise agreement with Grŵp Llandrillo Menai, and Coleg Cambria for delivery of a part-time Foundation Degree in Agriculture. This aims to address a gap in the delivery of this subject on a part-time basis in North Wales. The University approves collaborative modules through the ordinary module approval process, as outlined in the Academic Quality Handbook, and it has agreements with collaborative partners for individual modules. Meetings with staff confirmed that in relation to student placements, students have responsibility for finding their placement but have a supervisor at the University as their point of contact should any difficulties arise. The University issues guidance to placement hosts on their role.

2.123   Partnerships with overseas universities include research links, student exchanges and summer schools. The process for establishing a student exchange includes the submission of an exchanges justification form to the International Office. The University's articulation agreements with overseas institutions facilitate entry to the second or third year of the University's programmes. Staff use an articulation agreement application and mapping template to align the partner's course with the University's. The University is developing other franchise agreements, one of which builds on an existing articulation agreement.

2.124   The University opened its first overseas campus, in Mauritius, in October 2015, classified as a 'campus agreement' with the University retaining full control of the learning and teaching provision. To oversee the arrangement the University has established an Academic Management Committee at the campus, which reports to the Academic Board. The procedure and criteria for staff appointments and the Mauritius campus reflects those of the UK campus. A link tutor system supports staff teaching in Mauritius and UK-based staff also travel to Mauritius to teach. The same quality assurance systems operate at the branch campus, and the same rules, regulations and processes apply to students. University staff and external examiners oversee standards to ensure comparability with UK-based students. A Dean and a Quality Assurance and Enhancement Manager, seconded from the University, manage the Mauritius campus, and an Operations Manual supports their work. Students at the Mauritius campus receive the University's degrees and certificates on completion of their studies. The review team held meetings with staff involved with the Mauritius campus and found that the processes and procedures in place secured standards and quality. Students at the campus can access the University's Student Support Services remotely. At present, the University outsources local student support services due to the small number of students. The review team also held discussions with students at the Mauritius campus and found that they were very satisfied overall with the quality of the teaching provision. Some problems with accommodation and transport were raised by Mauritius students, which the University is addressing. The University's first Partner Performance Evaluation will be for the Mauritius campus in the summer of 2016.

2.125   The University maintains oversight of academic standards and quality at its partner institutions through various measures, depending upon the type of arrangement. These can include link tutor visits to the partner organisation, standard University procedures for annual monitoring of taught programmes, external examining procedures and partner performance evaluations. The review team found that these arrangements enabled the University to maintain academic standards and provide good quality learning opportunities.

2.126   The University recognises the importance of rigorous approval and monitoring procedures. Minutes show that the ICPC scrutinises proposals and makes recommendations for the Academic Board's approval. The ICPC also undertakes reviews of agreements and memoranda of understanding.

2.127   The University has in place an appropriate and effective framework for the management of higher education with others, and it maintains the strength of partnership arrangements and manages risks effectively. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B11): Research degrees are awarded in a research environment that provides secure academic standards for doing research and learning about research approaches, methods, procedures and protocols.
This environment offers students quality of opportunities and the support they need to achieve successful academic, personal and professional outcomes from their research degrees.

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*

Findings

2.128　　The Graduate School, located within the Institute of Education, Graduate and Professional Development, oversees the University's postgraduate provision. This includes a Head of the Graduate School and staff, who organise and provide development for research students and research training.

2.129　　The Postgraduate Admissions Office provides guidance for departmental postgraduate admission and encourages the use of interviews at the admissions stage, requiring them for the award of postgraduate research studentships. Students submit proposals for research projects, which staff judge alongside their academic qualifications and references. Departments must confirm at this stage that they have supervisors and resources to facilitate the proposed project. For the first year of full-time study, or within the first two years of part-time study, a prospective PhD student undergoes probation and must demonstrate satisfactory progress in order to register for the following year, or to upgrade from MPhil to PhD.

2.130　　At the beginning of the academic year and at the commencement of semester two the University runs an induction programme for new postgraduate research students across all departments. Specific inductions also take place in the students' departments. Students receive the Code of Practice for Research Postgraduates, which details the respective roles, responsibilities and expectations of the student and supervisor. It also provides information on progress monitoring and procedures for appeals, complaints and unacceptable academic practice.

2.131　　A handbook for supervisors also details the responsibilities and expectations of supervisors, including their responsibility for assessing students' development needs, reading written drafts and maintaining subject knowledge. All research students have a supervisory team of at least two people, and the Graduate School organises regular training sessions for supervisors. Students participate in annual formal progress meetings, and a University-wide meeting, chaired by the Head of the Graduate School, considers any issues arising from these meetings, such as changes from MPhil to PhD, or recommendations to terminate a candidature.

2.132　　The University conducts vivas in accordance with its regulations and requires an independent chair. Two examiners examine theses, normally one internal and one external examiner, although two externals examine staff candidates. The Head of the Graduate School approves examiner appointments.

2.133　　The University appoints external examiners in accordance with procedures. As part of their report template, the University expects external examiners to comment on any issues that they should draw to the attention of the University. The RDC comments on, and identifies any further action in relation to, any issues raised.

2.134　　The RDC reports to the Academic Board. Its remit includes overseeing all research provision at the University and its membership includes two student representatives. It

receives minutes from the Research Students' Consultative Committee (RSCC) and reports from Graduate School monitoring meetings. In order to oversee student progress the RDC also considers data, such as reports on extensions and submission rates for full-time PhD candidates, and any issues raised by external examiners. The RDC asks institutes or the AQRO to comment on matters raised by external examiners so that it can decide whether it requires any further action.

2.135   The RSCC's membership comprises student and staff representatives from institutes and professional service departments. It meets three times each academic year, chaired by the Head of the Graduate School. The meeting provides the Graduate School with an opportunity to inform students, to seek their views, and for student representatives to raise items of interest with the University.

2.136   Research students have representation within departments and may raise issues of concern within their own institute or directly with the Graduate School. Representatives can also raise issues at the RSCC. If informal means do not resolve issues of concern students may raise a formal complaint according to the process described in the Code of Practice for Research Postgraduates. The Code also details how students can raise appeals against adverse decisions taken by monitoring committees or examination boards.

2.137   The Graduate School runs a Researcher Development Programme and draws on expertise both internal and external to the University. A handbook provides details of the programme, which includes induction and a range of other activities that develop research, professional and transferable skills. The programme includes annual graduate workshops, including a compulsory professional conduct workshop run twice a year as part of the induction programme. The Careers Service provides further development, in conjunction with the Graduate School, on topics such as career management, making decisions and networking.

2.138   Research postgraduates can support undergraduate teaching for a maximum of six hours a week for full-time students. Responsibilities may include marking and assessment. The induction programme introduces students to teaching requirements, and departments arrange workshops within subject areas through the CDSAP. Postgraduate research students can also participate in staff development activities leading up to the PGCTHE and HEA Fellowship status.

2.139   The design of the processes put in place to support research degree students, and the award of research degrees, would allow the Expectation to be met. The review team tested the Expectation by reviewing evidence including research regulations, the Code of Practice for Research Postgraduates, handbooks, relevant committee minutes and information on the Researcher Development Programme. Formal meetings were also held with postgraduate research and students, and academic staff involved in the conduct and management of research.

2.140   The University admits research students in accordance with its published procedures and guidance. It consistently applies its clear procedures at departmental level through appropriately qualified staff, with measures taken to ensure equality of opportunity for applicants. The review team learned that although students already known to a department from studying a taught degree could be admitted without a formal interview, in practice all students who met the review team had been interviewed. The University conducts interviews through video or teleconference when circumstances do not permit face-to-face engagement. Students noted that a significant factor influencing their decision to study at Aberystwyth was staff reputation and expertise.

2.141   Upon enrolment, research students receive a University-level induction, run by the Graduate School to introduce students to research life at the University prior to a more

informal departmental induction. Students joining in the middle of the academic year receive their formal induction in February or wait for the next September session. A number of the postgraduate research students who met the review team had joined mid-year and had not received a formal induction for several weeks or months after arrival. Students reported that the formal induction involved an intense information-giving exercise delivered in a three-hour session. Students considered the informal department-based inductions to vary in their effectiveness, but considered them overall useful and informative. Students are aware of the Research Handbook and are confident that they would know where to find further information about any aspect of study. The University's PRES results indicate that the University falls below Welsh benchmarks in a number of areas, including a 46 per cent agreement that there are opportunities to become involved in the wider research community induction and a 34 per cent agreement regarding the provision of appropriate support and guidance for teaching. This led the team to consider further the effectiveness of induction processes and the ability for students to immerse themselves in a research community beyond their department or institute.

2.142   The review team found that the handbook for supervisors is two years out of date, and the University was updating it at the time of the review. Research students' supervisory teams comprise at least two people, although the University has no single set model for the operation of these teams, and, for example, the supervisory team could include an additional industrial supervisor. The model for personal tutor support also varies and often the tutor is someone other than the supervisor. The Graduate School-led supervisor training sessions emphasise the need for effective monitoring of student progress, and research students from across the University spoke of frequent and constructive engagement with their supervisors on both a formal and informal level. This includes yearly monitoring and regular progress management meetings. All students are fully aware of the process and method of assessment and are very positive regarding the University's research environment.

2.143   The University's RDC functions effectively and considers a range of information and data. This includes reports from Graduate School monitoring meetings, minutes from the RSCC, reports on PhD submissions and study extensions, and comments made by external examiners for University attention, drawn together into a summary report. For example, a recent summary report of issues raised by external examiners highlighted potential supervisory failings and the possible failure of ethical procedures. The RDC considered these matters and took appropriate action. One of RDC's current objectives involves considering how to improve theses submission rates.

2.144   Recently, the RDC oversaw the revision of all of the regulations associated with research degrees. One of the areas strengthened regarded eligibility to act as the chair of a viva. All staff must now attend training before nomination as chair, and the Graduate School is organising training sessions throughout the year 2015-16.

2.145   The RSCC actively considers matters of significance to the conduct of research and the experience of research students. While it can raise issues for formal consideration by the RDC through its minutes, the RSCC actively raises and resolves issues of relevance more directly, for example in liaison with Information Services regarding research-related software subscriptions.

2.146   The Researcher Development Programme run by the Graduate School comprises mandatory core modules and optional credit-based modules for full-time students, with optional elements of the programme available for part time students. The programme, benchmarked against the Researcher Development Framework, is reproduced in the Researcher Development Programme handbook, with full details of the programme and its requirements. In total, there are 25 credit-bearing modules available, some in English and some in Welsh, and the handbook details mandatory training and training expectations.

Supervisors monitor students' development in programmes to ensure continued engagement. Students and their supervisors identify the most suitable modules. External examiners and a board of studies oversee these credit-bearing modules, with final mark confirmation at Senate examination boards. Research skills can be further developed in an optional and popular Advanced Research Methods Package designed to provide highly focused advanced training in a wide range of methods and issues in qualitative research.

2.147   The University runs a compulsory professional conduct workshop at the start of year one and then at the start of the second semester as part of its postgraduate induction programme, covering research ethics, and issues of plagiarism, confidentiality, copyright, data protection, and freedom of information in the research and writing process. The University considers it important that students understand these matters early on in their studies. All students who met the review team have benefitted from the training and are aware of research ethics and the procedures to be followed within the University for the consideration of ethical issues. From year two onwards the Careers Service offers workshops to research students of the Graduate School, designed to support and complement the Researcher Development Framework.

2.148   Research postgraduates employed to support undergraduate teaching have responsibilities that may include marking and assessment. The University's induction programme introduces students to teaching requirements but does not provide guidance or training on teaching, although this may be provided by departments. University PRES feedback suggests that students do not always feel properly prepared, and students met by the review team had not received training prior to undertaking teaching or assessment. Students reported that they feel under-supported and have had to seek advice and guidance on teaching, and particularly assessment practice, in order to ensure that they can perform the role effectively. It is possible, but only optional, for students to take part in staff development activities leading up to the PGCTHE, which develops teaching and assessment skills. The Graduate School is working with the CDSAP on a new module that will lead to Associate Fellow status of the HEA while further study can lead to HEA Fellowship status. The review team considered the optionality of training in teaching and assessment to be a shortcoming in the professional development of postgraduate research students who will be undertaking teaching and/or assessment. The review team **recommends** that the University ensures that all postgraduate research students receive appropriate training before undertaking teaching and assessment.

2.149   Notwithstanding the absence of mandatory postgraduate research student training in preparation for teaching and/or assessment, the University has an effective framework for the support of research and research degree students, and appropriate processes governing the award of research degrees. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.150   In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the Higher Education Review: Wales Handbook.

2.151   The University meets all 11 Expectations in this judgement area, nine with low associated risk and two with moderate risk. The review team makes two recommendations in response to the two areas of moderate risks, which relate to insufficient student engagement in all assurance activities, and inconsistencies in the opportunities for students to appeal their results. The team makes one further recommendation in response to an absence of mandatory training for research students before they teach. The team identified one feature of good practice related to the personalised support for students prior to enrolment. The team affirms the steps being taken to implement formal periodic review processes at programme level. The few recommendations in relation to this judgement area do not necessitate major operational or procedural change.

2.152   The review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the University **meets** UK expectations.

3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

Expectation (C): UK higher education providers produce information for their intended audiences about the higher education they offer that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

Findings

3.1 The University provides information for prospective students, through its website and in printed prospectuses, on how to apply, accommodation, finances, additional costs and services at the University. The Marketing Department receives information on all courses from institutes, and reviews it to ensure compliance with CMA guidelines, Consumer Law, and University policy before publishing it. The University produces a Wider Information Set, although this is not a formal requirement. The quality of this information is assured through annual review by the Director of Marketing and Recruitment, and each section of the prospectus is checked by both academic and service departments for accuracy and completeness. The University's Executive Team reviews the final draft of the prospectus before its final approval by the Director of Marketing and Recruitment.

3.2 The University provides a specific handbook for mature students, which includes details on higher education, career development opportunities and information about courses, as well as entry requirements and funding and financial support. Prospective students with specific learning needs are provided with information about their entitlement to additional student support through Student Support Services.

3.3 The University provides information to current students in handbooks, although some students receive this at institute and others at departmental level. Research postgraduates are provided with a general information and code of practice handbook upon induction. Responsibility for definitive programme information rests with institutes, which must ensure that staff review the information and identify changes during annual monitoring. The University also reviews information for students during IDPAs. A designated member of staff in each professional service department, institute and department can populate and update their web pages and sign off on information. Students can also access the full set of academic regulations, including on complaints and appeals, on the AQRO website.

3.4 The University publishes information in both Welsh and English, with some exceptions, in accordance with the University's Welsh language commitments.

3.5 The Academic Quality Handbook provides staff with the information they need for module development and approval, assessment, annual monitoring, and on PSRBs. Staff can access information about quality assurance procedures through the AQRO website.

3.6 The University uses feedback from students to explore whether programme delivery matches student expectations and for assurance that its information is fit for purpose, including from NSS scores, PTES and PRES results, and feedback during annual monitoring of taught schemes and module reviews.

3.7 Upon completion of their programmes, students receive a Higher Education Achievement Report and a bilingual transcript.

3.8 The University provides information for external examiners through their letter of appointment, which directs them to the Academic Quality Handbook

3.9   The range of information and the processes for managing its quality would allow the Expectation to be met. The review team tested the Expectation in meetings with academic staff, students and support staff, and by looking at relevant documentation, including the Academic Quality Handbook and the minutes of programme approval panels, as well as the minutes of meetings.

3.10   The review team reviewed the handbook for mature students and found that it contained a sound introduction to the issues that may be of concern to mature students. Similarly, the code of practice handbook given to research students contains robust information about the expectations of research students, and students confirmed that they find it valuable.

3.11   Students whom the review team met confirmed that the information they had received about their programmes had been useful and accurate, and had prepared them to join the University to undertake their studies. Students confirmed that they understand the content, assessment procedures and demands of their degrees as communicated through their handbooks. Many handbooks contain hyperlinks to definitive University regulations maintained by the AQRO. The review team found inconsistencies in the handbooks given to students within different institutes. The University does not have a minimum requirement for the content of handbooks, so students pursuing different programmes receive handbooks of varying scope and detail. The University attributed this to the variability between programmes, with some handbooks detailing field trips, for example, and others detailing placements. This variability extends to information about academic appeals, with some departments, but not all, inviting students to make informal appeals. The review team **recommends** that the University ensures consistency of core information provided to students in handbooks within and across institutes.

3.12   The University's systems for assuring the quality of information about higher education provision are appropriately robust, and information is consistently and readily available to the appropriate audiences. Notwithstanding the recommendation, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low, as the variability of handbooks represents a need to amend or update details in documentation, where the amendment will not require or result in major structural, operational or procedural change.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The quality of the information about learning opportunities: Summary of findings

3.13   In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the Higher Education Review: Wales Handbook.

3.14   The University meets the Expectation, with low associated risk. The review team makes one recommendation in relation to this judgement area in response to inconsistencies between student handbooks. This recommendation relates to a need to amend or update details in documentation, where the amendment will not require or result in major structural, operational or procedural change. The review team identified no affirmations or features of good practice in relation to this judgement area.

3.15   The review team concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at the University **meets** UK expectations.

4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

Expectation (Enhancement): Deliberate steps are being taken at provider level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities.

Findings

4.1 The University has a clear Strategic Plan 2012-17, with 'teaching that inspires' at its core for education, along with its vision for 'innovative, creative teaching, delivered by primarily research active staff'. A specific Learning and Teaching Strategy has three themes of enriching the student experience, graduate skills and employability, and widening access. The SSP provides the operational plan to deliver the Strategy, and details various short and long-term work streams: improving quality of undergraduate teaching, feedback, student support, retention, and the first-year experience.

4.2 The Planning Department manages the specific targets accompanying the SSP and other corporate key performance indicators. Each institute's Learning and Teaching Committee develops an action plan in response to the NSS, which is then approved and monitored by the QAC. Operational work strands aligning with the SSP include the TUN campaign, improving student attainment, the review of personal tutors, retention projects, and enhancing student employability. Working parties exist for these initiatives, reporting to the Academic Board or one of its subcommittees. The TUN campaign has had a significant impact, informing at institutional and departmental level, and aligned with module evaluations.

4.3 The University has a number of initiatives and investments in the student experience, which enable the delivery of the Learning and Teaching Strategy. These include investment in the learning facilities and estates; technology-enhanced learning, including work to enhance the VLE and use lecture capture; the use of Exemplary Course Awards and the Aber-Bangor Academy Showcase to celebrate best practice; and the further enablement of e-submission of student coursework. The University has arrangements to enhance staff academic skills, by using the UK Professional Standards Framework, delivering the PGCTHE, and recognising academic staff who teach in promotion criteria. The University has an annual learning and teaching conference for showcasing good teaching, and it demonstrates engagement with future directions work strands.

4.4 The University has built reflection and enhancement into its quality assurance process. The Recruitment Action Group, and Recruitment and Marketing Committee, analyse and respond to statistical data, including students' survey results, on admissions processes, and their work is supplemented by the retention working group's analysis of retention and admissions data. A range of student surveys, consultative committees and forums enable student feedback, which informs enhancement related to learning and teaching, enabling student achievement, and assessment. The annual monitoring and periodic review processes build on feedback from students and external examiners to identify enhancements to programmes. The Academic Board evaluates and responds to an annual report on student complaints and appeals. The University's arrangements for the enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities would allow the Expectation to be met. The review team tested the Expectation by evaluating documents including strategies, the SSP, institute strategies and minutes of meetings. The review team also discussed arrangements for enhancement with senior staff, academic staff, professional support staff and students.

4.5   Staff and students met by the review team are aware of the University's principle approaches to enhancement. Staff were able to articulate instances of where the University's strategic aims have had an impact at institute and programme level, for example the impact of technology-enhanced learning and of improved consistency in responding to students' mitigating circumstances in assessment.

4.6   In response to NSS results, institutes develop action plans approved by the QAC, with additional action plans for themes (such as employability, technology-enhanced learning) designating responsibilities to senior institute staff. However, the review team found that institute strategies and action plans do not align to the University Learning and Teaching Strategy or Strategic Plans. For instance, the University-level strategies run from 2012-17, but a sample of three institute learning and teaching strategies run for different periods: 2015-20, 2013-18 and 2014-19 respectively. This creates a risk that institute strategies are not as aligned to, or responsive to, the University strategies as they could be. Some staff were unaware of the strategic drivers behind the SSP or the Learning and Teaching Strategy. The review team **recommends** that the University consolidates and clearly articulates strategic priorities for the enhancement of learning opportunities at institute level.

4.7   The University has an effective approach to enhancing the quality of students' learning opportunities. The University works to enhance key areas relating to the student experience, as defined by the SSP, and these enhancements are managed effectively through action plans and working party governance. The University evidently supports learning and teaching activities and initiatives, and actively identifies and disseminates good practice. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.8   In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the Higher Education Review: Wales Handbook.

4.9   The University meets the Expectation, with low associated risk. The review team makes one recommendation in relation to this judgement area in response to inconsistencies between University and institute strategies. This recommendation reflects a need to amend or update details in documentation, where the amendment will not require or result in major structural, operational or procedural change. The review team identified no affirmations or features of good practice in relation to this judgement area.

4.10   The review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the University **meets** UK expectations.

5   Commentary on Internationalisation

Findings

5.1   The University articulates international development as a priority in Aim 4 of its Strategic Plan, 'Engaging the World: building an International reputation, attracting students and working in collaboration with internationally recognised partners'. The Learning and Teaching Strategy also incorporates internationalisation as a theme: Enriching the Student Experience.

5.2   The University's international strategy includes focus on developing research links with overseas universities, student and staff exchanges, and summer schools. More formally, the University has 12 articulation agreements with overseas institutions, and is in the process of developing franchise agreements with one of these bodies. The University opened its first overseas campus, in Mauritius, in October 2015.

5.3   The University has created an International Forum for University staff to discuss existing and potential international activity, and to enable a coordinated approach to achieving the internationalisation aims. Responsibility for the oversight of collaborative provision, including international partnerships, rests with the ICPC, which reports to the Academic Board.

5.4   The University aims to increase substantially the number of international students on the University's degree programmes in the UK. Responsibility for marketing and recruitment, managing education agents, partnership activity, and market intelligence rests with the International Office. The International Office also reports on market demand to help ensure that the University's programmes remain attractive to an international audience, and it maintains contact with international students prior to and during their time at the University.

5.5   The University also aims to increase the number of its students participating in international exchange programmes. Student involvement in the University's exchange programmes, Erasmus+ and International Exchange, remains low at about four per cent. The University would like to increase this to around 10 per cent of students; the review team heard from staff about support at department and institute level for students undertaking exchanges, and initiatives such as the Study Abroad Fair.

Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Definitions of key operational terms are also given on pages 27-29 of the Higher Education Review: Wales handbook.

If you require formal definitions of other terms please refer to the section on assuring standards and quality: www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality.

User-friendly explanations of a wide range of terms can be found in the longer **Glossary** on the QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/Pages/GlossaryEN.aspx.

Academic standards
The standards set by **degree-awarding bodies** for their courses (programmes and modules) and expected for their awards. See also **threshold academic standard**.

Award
A qualification, or academic credit, conferred in formal recognition that a student has achieved the intended **learning outcomes** and passed the assessments required to meet the academic standards set for a **programme** or unit of study.

Blended learning
Learning delivered by a number of different methods, usually including face-to-face and e-learning (see **technology enhanced or enabled learning**).

Credit(s)
A means of quantifying and recognising learning, used by most institutions that provide higher education **programmes of study**, expressed as numbers of credits at a specific level.

Degree-awarding body
A UK higher education provider (typically a university) with the power to award degrees, conferred by Royal Charter, or under Section 76 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, or under Section 48 of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992, or by Papal Bull, or, since 1999, granted by the Privy Council on advice from QAA (in response to applications for taught degree awarding powers, research degree awarding powers or university title).

Distance learning
A course of study that does not involve face-to-face contact between students and tutors but instead uses technology such as the internet, intranets, broadcast media, CD-ROM and video, or traditional methods of correspondence - learning 'at a distance'.
See also **blended learning**.

Dual award or double award
The granting of separate awards (and certificates) for the same **programme** by two **degree-awarding bodies** who have jointly delivered the programme of study leading to them. See also **multiple award**.

e-learning
See technology enhanced or enabled learning

Enhancement
The process by which higher education providers systematically improve the quality of provision and the ways in which students' learning is supported. It is used as a technical term in our review processes.

Expectations
Statements in the **Quality Code** that set out what all UK higher education providers expect of themselves and each other, and what the general public can therefore expect of them.

Flexible and distributed learning
A programme or module that does not require the student to attend classes or events at particular times and locations.
See also **distance learning**.

Framework
A published formal structure. See also **framework for higher education qualifications**.

Framework for higher education qualifications
A published formal structure that identifies a hierarchy of national qualification levels and describes the general achievement expected of holders of the main qualification types at each level, thus assisting higher education providers in maintaining academic standards. QAA publishes the following frameworks: *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and *The Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland* (FQHEIS).

Good practice
A process or way of working that, in the view of a QAA review team, makes a particularly positive contribution to a higher education provider's management of academic standards and the quality of its educational provision. It is used as a technical term in QAA's audit and review processes.

Learning opportunities
The provision made for students' learning, including planned study, teaching, assessment, academic and personal support, and resources (such as libraries and information systems, laboratories or studios).

Learning outcomes
What a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completing a process of learning.

Multiple awards
An arrangement where three or more **degree-awarding bodies** together provide a single jointly delivered **programme** (or programmes) leading to a separate **award** (and separate certification) of each awarding body. The arrangement is the same as for **dual/double awards**, but with three or more awarding bodies being involved.

Operational definition
A formal definition of a term, establishing exactly what QAA means when using it in reviews and reports.

Programme (of study)
An approved course of study that provides a coherent learning experience and normally leads to a qualification.

Programme specifications
Published statements about the intended **learning outcomes** of programmes of study, containing information about teaching and learning methods, support and assessment methods, and how individual units relate to levels of achievement.

Public information
Information that is freely available to the public (sometimes referred to as being 'in the public domain').

Quality Code
Short term for the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, which is the UK-wide set of **reference points** for higher education providers (agreed through consultation with the higher education community, and published by QAA), which states the **Expectations** that all providers are required to meet.

Reference points
Statements and other publications that establish criteria against which performance can be measured.

Subject Benchmark Statement
A published statement that sets out what knowledge, understanding, abilities and skills are expected of those graduating in each of the main subject areas (mostly applying to bachelor's degrees), and explains what gives that particular discipline its coherence and identity.

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or **e-learning**)
Learning that is delivered or supported through the use of technology.

Threshold academic standard
The minimum acceptable level of achievement that a student has to demonstrate to be eligible for an academic **award**. Threshold academic standards are set out in the national **frameworks** and **Subject Benchmark Statements**.

Virtual learning environment (VLE)
An intranet or password-only interactive website (also referred to as a platform or user interface) giving access to **learning opportunities** electronically. These might include such resources as course handbooks, information and reading lists; blogs, message boards and forums; recorded lectures; and/or facilities for online seminars (webinars).

Widening participation
Increasing the involvement in higher education of people from a wider range of backgrounds.