



# Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) of Al-Maktoum College of Higher Education

May 2016

## Contents

<b>About this review .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Key findings.....</b>	<b>2</b>
QAA's judgements about Al-Maktoum College of Higher Education .....	2
Good practice .....	2
Recommendations .....	2
Theme: Digital Literacy .....	3
Financial sustainability, management and governance .....	3
<b>About Al-Maktoum College of Higher Education.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Explanation of the findings about Al-Maktoum College of Higher Education ....</b>	<b>6</b>
1 Judgement: The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding organisations.....	7
2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities.....	20
3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities .....	39
4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities .....	42
5 Commentary on the Theme: Digital Literacy .....	45
<b>Glossary.....</b>	<b>46</b>

## About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Al-Maktoum College of Higher Education. The review took place from 24 to 26 May 2016 and was conducted by a team of two reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Christopher Clare
- Mrs Jane Durant.

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by Al-Maktoum College of Higher Education 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)<sup>1</sup> 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 (Alternative Providers) 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.

In Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) there is also a check on the provider's financial sustainability, management and governance (FSMG). This check has the aim of giving students reasonable confidence that they should not be at risk of being unable to complete their course as a result of financial failure of their education provider.

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 6.

In reviewing Al-Maktoum College of Higher Education the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland. The [themes](#) for the academic year 2015-16 are Student Employability, and Digital Literacy,<sup>2</sup> and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.<sup>3</sup> A dedicated section explains the method for [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).<sup>4</sup> For an explanation of terms see the [glossary](#) at the end of this report.

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<sup>1</sup> The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code).

<sup>2</sup> Higher Education Review themes: [www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2859](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2859).

<sup>3</sup> QAA website: [www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us).

<sup>4</sup> Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers): [www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Pages/Educational-Oversight.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Pages/Educational-Oversight.aspx).

## Key findings

### QAA's judgements about Al-Maktoum College of Higher Education

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at Al-Maktoum College of Higher Education.

- The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of the degree-awarding organisation **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **requires improvement to meet** UK expectations.
- The quality of the information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **requires improvement to meet** UK expectations.

### Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at Al-Maktoum College of Higher Education.

- The revision of teaching methodologies and creation of high quality resources for the teaching of Arabic, which supports student learning opportunities (Expectation B3)
- The effective utilisation of a wide-ranging academic network to raise the profile of research and stimulate student learning (Expectation B3).
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### Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to Al-Maktoum College of Higher Education.

By September 2016:

- maintain definitive records of student admission interviews to ensure the transparency of the process (Expectation B2)
- provide training for student representatives in order to equip them more fully for their roles (Expectation B5)
- formalise arrangements for the routine monitoring of information to ensure it remains fit for purpose and trustworthy (Expectation C).

By December 2016:

- finalise the review of the governance structure and revise all committee terms of reference to ensure clarity of responsibilities for standards, quality and enhancement (Expectations A2.1, A3.3, B7, B8 and Enhancement)
- formalise and document the internal procedure for the design, development and approval of new programmes (Expectation B1)
- formalise and implement the strategic approach to learning and teaching (Expectation B3)
- ensure scrupulous use of external verifier reports is made through the College's committee structure (Expectations B7, B8 and A2.1)
- formalise and document the process for annual monitoring (Expectations B8, B1, A2.1 and A3.3)

- strengthen the programme annual monitoring process by systematically identifying and analysing relevant information to assure and enhance the quality of student learning opportunities (Expectations B8, B7, B4, A2.1, A2.2, A3.3 and Enhancement)
- devise and implement arrangements for periodic review (Expectation B8)
- develop and disseminate a strategic approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities that is embedded at all levels (Enhancement).

## **Theme: Digital Literacy**

Approaches to digital literacy at Al-Maktoum College of Higher Education are in the early stages of development. The College is presently seeking to develop and use integrated learning technologies, although it does not yet have an articulated strategic approach towards extending students' digital literacy skills.

Significant emphasis is placed on the use of the College's virtual learning environment as its primary vehicle for developing student digital literacy. It is currently used as a repository for learning materials and programme information: examples of information accessed by students include course details, weekly outlines, assessments and resources. Students complete a developmental and certificated short course in the use of plagiarism-detection software so as to support assessment activity.

Students and staff are well supported by administrative and library staff, and the College is conscientious in providing ongoing training for professional staff in the use of the VLE, so as to support ongoing student digital skills. College academic staff are working with students to develop their digital skills through the promoted use of interactive discussion forums that are linked to assessment weightings. Students studying Arabic use learning resources that extend their language acquisition skills and are encouraged to access current news items through web links. Further support in the use of technology is provided through the library, where access to online publications and journals is available. The College is exploring the provision of distance learning, and in preparation for this is filming and making audio recordings of lectures, which are posted on the VLE and social media for students to access. This approach has been commended by the College's awarding organisation.

## **Financial sustainability, management and governance**

There were no material issues identified at Al-Maktoum College of Higher Education during the financial sustainability, management and governance check.

Further explanation of the key findings can be found in the handbook available on the QAA webpage explaining [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).

## About Al-Maktoum College of Higher Education

Al-Maktoum College of Higher Education (the College) was founded in Dundee in 2001, through the initiative of HH Shaikh Hamdan Bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, Deputy Ruler of Dubai, UAE Minister of Finance, and the founder of a personal, humanitarian charity organisation, the Al-Maktoum Foundation. The College regards itself as an independent, research-led provider and not a religious institution. The College states that 'It has no political and/or ideological agenda...and seeks to promote thought-provoking debates and an intellectual and scientific understanding of Islamic tradition and Muslim societies'.

The College's mission is to 'pursue excellence in teaching, research, and consultancy in the academic study of Islam and Muslims as an implementation of the vision for education and multiculturalism'.

At the time of its last QAA review in 2012 the College was under teach-out arrangements with the University of Aberdeen for its taught master's and PhD programmes of study. As noted in the last review report, the University's decision was taken for strategic reasons and not as a consequence of any action on the part of the College. The College has since entered into a series of preliminary discussions with a number of other higher education institutions. From 2013, and at the time of the review, the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) approved the College, to deliver the following awards:

- Professional Diploma in Islamic Economics and Finance (six students)
- Advanced Diploma in Islamic Studies (one student)
- Advanced Diploma in Arabic Language (two students)
- Diploma in Arabic Language (two students)
- Certificate in Arabic Language (two students).

The programmes are placed within the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) at levels 7-11. The College is approved deliver two other programmes at SCQF levels 5-6.

The College has six academic members of staff delivering its higher education programmes, two of whom are visiting fellows.

At the College's last QAA review visit, the team identified three features of good practice: strong student representation on, and engagement in, the work of College committees; the supportive learning environment; and the encouragement given, and funding available, for staff development activities, particularly those involving research. The review team also made one advisable and five desirable recommendations:

- to review the manner in which external examiners' reports are given proper formal consideration, acted upon and recorded in the minutes of meetings (advisable)
- to consider ways of systematically recording actions taken to address recommendations arising from awarding partner's approval events (desirable)
- to continue to liaise with the awarding body to encourage regular and consistent attendance at committee meetings (desirable)
- to encourage better staff engagement with Academic Infrastructure expectations (desirable)
- to introduce a formal system of peer review of teaching (desirable)
- to complete the current development work to introduce a formal staff development and review process (desirable).

The SQA sits as a member of the College Council and the review team found there to be effective liaison between the College and its awarding organisation. The College has

continued to support staff and students' development, both academic and professional, through a dedicated fund, and its Academic Affairs Committee has recently introduced a process for peer review that provides academic staff with developmental feedback to support teaching practice. However, the review team found no connection between the College's staff development arrangements, the peer review process and the staff appraisal scheme.

In April 2015, the College ran an internal staff workshop to consider the impact of the Quality Code on the College's work. The outcome of the workshop was a comprehensive mapping of the Quality Code against the College's policies and procedures.

Of the remaining desirable recommendations, the review team found insufficient evidence to demonstrate that the College makes proper formal consideration of feedback from external verifier reports, as its terms of references for its deliberative committee structure do not outline clearly where the responsibility lies. This was found to be equally evident within the College's arrangements for annual monitoring and has led to recommendations being made as follows: under Expectation A2.1 in relation to clarity of responsibilities for standards, quality and enhancement; under Expectation B7 in relation to making scrupulous use of external verifier reports; and under Expectation B8 for the strengthening of the programme annual monitoring process by systematically identifying and analysing relevant information.

## Explanation of the findings about Al-Maktoum College of Higher Education

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 maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding organisations**

**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 College is an approved centre for the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA). It delivers five customised higher education awards that are certified and quality assured by the SQA: a Certificate in Arabic Language (level 8); an Advanced Diploma in Islamic Studies (level 10); a Diploma in Arabic Language (level 10, with 24 credit); an Advanced Diploma in Arabic Language (level 10, with 60 credit) and a Professional Diploma in Islamic Economics and Finance (level 11).

1.2 The College recognises that the primary responsibility for academic standards rests with the SQA as the awarding organisation, which determines that national frameworks are met. As such, much of the procedures in use are those of the SQA.

1.3 During development, the College's programmes have been mapped to the external reference points of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF); units offered range from levels 5 to 11. In addition, the College has actively engaged with the SQA in reviewing credit rating and qualification approval levels.

1.4 The College is an independent contractor and is permitted to seek validation of other qualifications by third parties during the term of its agreement with the SQA. At the time of the review, plans to partner with another higher education awarding body so as to offer under and postgraduate degrees were underway.

1.5 These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.6 In addition to a self-evaluation document produced by the College for this review, the review team scrutinised the College's processes and their effectiveness by considering the agreements with the SQA, programme specifications, minutes of meetings, and an external verifier's report. The review team also held meetings with senior managers, students, and academic and professional staff.

1.7 Students have easy access to programme specifications, unit learning outcomes, assessments and assessment criteria through a variety of means, including the student handbook, unit guides, the College's virtual learning environment (VLE) and assessment briefs. Stated unit learning outcomes align accurately with the relevant levels of the SCQF at level 8 for the Certificate programme, at level 10 for the two Advanced Diploma programmes, at level 10 for the Diploma in Arabic Language programme, and at level 11 for the Professional Diploma.

1.8 SQA applies rigour by requiring the College to submit evidence for consideration by its Credit Rating Decision Group. Approval for variations to awards is certified through a formal process. Evidence presented to the review team confirms compliance with these arrangements.

1.9 College staff demonstrate understanding of and compliance with the SQA academic framework through a responsibilities checklist submitted as evidence to this review. This is clear and unambiguous. Teaching staff confirm that, in addition to using SQA's frameworks, they also make reference to Subject Benchmark Statements when designing their programmes.

1.10 Academic standards are assured through the engagement of the College with its awarding organisation and the provision of programmes that align with the SCQF. 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**

1.11 The College recognises that the primary responsibility for academic standards rests with SQA.

1.12 The College's governance and committee structure is led by the College Council. The Council focuses on the mission, structures and strategic direction of the College and has ultimate responsibility for governance. In addition to the four subcommittees of the Council that focus on audit, community services, finance and general purposes, and nominations, a number of other committees, including the Academic Affairs Committee (AAC), currently feed into the Council.

1.13 The College aligns with SQA's frameworks and regulations, as well as with Subject Benchmark Statements, in its design of learning and assessments. External subject specialists worked with College specialists in designing and developing programmes. Academic staff frequently engaged with representatives from the SQA during the design of its programmes to ensure suitability of delivery and assessment.

1.14 The existing and proposed internal governance structures would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.15 The review team tested the Expectation by reading the sections of the evidence base that relate to College committees and organisational structures, and meeting senior, academic and professional staff, and a representative from SQA.

1.16 The review team acknowledges that the College is currently in the process of restructuring its governance and committee structure, and that the organisational chart presented to the team reflects future intention rather than its current arrangements. The College plans to reinstate an Academic Council that will report directly to the College Council in place of the AAC. The AAC will then report to the Academic Council. Presently, the Academic Council is in abeyance.

1.17 With the support of the College Council, the Principal works carefully to ensure that the College has the appropriate governance and staffing structure to best position the College to realise its mission and aims. The need for two key additional posts, to lead on registry and quality, has been appropriately identified by senior managers, thus ensuring an increased focus on quality and standards. The review team agrees with the College that these will be key posts and valuable additions in the maintenance of academic standards.

1.18 Through its scrutiny of the terms of references and minutes of meetings for the College Council and its deliberative committees, the review team found little evidence to demonstrate any detailed analysis of academic quality and standards arising from student outcomes, student feedback, annual monitoring reports and external verifier reports. As current terms of reference for committees, other than the AAC, do not specify responsibility for quality, standards or enhancement, the review team considers that there is the potential for oversight of aspects of academic standards to be overlooked, and for opportunities for enhancement to be missed. The review team **recommends** that, by

December 2016, the College finalises the review of the governance structure and revises all committee terms of reference to ensure clarity of responsibilities for standards, quality and enhancement.

1.19 Through the work of the College's SQA Coordinator and its academic staff, the College works closely and productively with SQA to develop appropriate policies and procedures, including the assessment and internal verification policies, to assure academic standards. Robust monitoring of standards in assessment is maintained through the internal verification of all student work.

1.20 Meetings of examiners are appropriate mechanisms to further assure the internal approval of student grades. However, the review team found that arrangements for the presentation and analysis of the award of credit throughout the College committee structure, for example the AAC, are not explicit. Furthermore, the template and content of draft programme coordinators' reports do not contain analysis of student outcomes or award of credit. This leads to a recommendation being made under Expectation B8.

1.21 While the College's governance arrangements provide frameworks to secure the award of credit through engagement and oversight from the SQA, its lack of clarity about the responsibilities for standards, quality and enhancement within its deliberative committee structure has led to a recommendation being made and to two further recommendations being made in section 2 of this report in relation to the College's scrupulous use of external verifier feedback and the formalised arrangements for monitoring and review. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is moderate.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Moderate**

**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**

1.22 The SQA is responsible for holding the definitive record of each programme and qualification. Through the process of centre approval and customised programme approval, the SQA officially confirms the College's right to deliver its programmes. The College uses the reference points, aims and intended learning outcomes of the SCQF.

1.23 The Customised Awards Agreement and the Credit Rated Customised Award submission forms detail the programmes approved by the SQA. These are available to academic staff through the College's internal shared academic folder. Programme specifications, unit specifications, credits and learning expectations are outlined in the Students' Handbook and in course content guides on the College's website. Students are also able to view unit information and other relevant documentation through the VLE.

1.24 Minor modifications to programmes are proposed by staff, considered through unit coordinators' reports and annual monitoring, and presented to the AAC. Major modifications to programmes, such as the change in programme titles, are submitted for formal approval by the SQA.

1.25 The College's governance and committee structure is led by the College Council, which focuses on the mission, structures and strategic direction of the College. The AAC feeds into the Council and is responsible for the effective running and development of academic issues.

1.26 The College's arrangements would allow for the Expectation to be met.

1.27 In testing the Expectation the review team read the self-evaluation document; the Students' Handbook, incorporating programme specifications, accreditation certificates and documents; the College's VLE; student records; and minutes of the AAC. The team also met senior and academic staff and a representative from the SQA.

1.28 Appropriate oversight and monitoring of programmes is maintained through meetings of the AAC, of which the College's SQA Coordinator, Principal and academic staff are members. At these meetings, members reflect on practices pertaining to course delivery and design, setting actions for improvements. The requirement for formal approval of proposed modifications through the AAC appropriately assures the maintenance of accurate records. As detailed under Expectation B8, current arrangements for annual programme monitoring will benefit from further development in order to ensure that unit coordinator and programme reports include evidence-based analysis of achievement, outcomes, and monitoring of the impact of planned interventions undertaken to maintain and improve standards.

1.29 Close liaison with SQA by the College's SQA Coordinator ensures currency of information and acceptable practices, and further oversight is confirmed through the work of

the SQA external verifier to confirm standards of assessment. The recent external verifier report, received during the review visit, confirmed the maintenance of standards.

1.30 All academic records are securely held by central administrative staff, including assessment grades, attendance, and assessment extension approval. These serve as definitive records of student information.

1.31 The College maintains records of the programmes that it delivers. On completion, students are provided with a certificate of their studies from the SQA, in accordance with its requirements, administered through the College.

1.32 The College maintains effective and definitive records of the programmes it delivers through its programme and administrative teams, and the AAC. Records of the programmes that the College is approved to deliver are available to prospective students, current students and staff. 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**

1.33 The College's programmes were designed and approved in association with the SQA, which holds responsibility for ensuring that qualifications meet national academic standards. This involves a credit rating process and qualification approval-level scrutiny. The College uses the SCQF, the Quality Code and Subject Benchmark Statements in the development of units and programmes.

1.34 The programme approval process involves validation visits by SQA representatives to the College. The result is an approval report from SQA that details the scrutiny under a number of categories and confirms approval at qualification and unit level. There is a guide for SQA Coordinators, which indicates that the submission to SQA is through a pro forma. The AAC is involved in the process through scrutiny of the approval documentation and the SQA report.

1.35 The College's arrangements would allow for the Expectation to be met.

1.36 The review team examined documentation, including the self-evaluation document, the SQA approval visit report, and the centre approval application form and report. In addition, the review team held meetings with the Principal, senior staff and teaching staff to test its operational effectiveness.

1.37 Staff and students are supported to acquire knowledge and understanding of SQA requirements for upholding academic standards. Programme specifications are readily available for students and staff in programme handbooks, through the VLE, and summarised on the College website. Programme information includes appropriate details relating to standards, for example, unit titles and codes, credit weightings and SCQF levels. Programme and unit learning outcomes are clearly set out in programme and unit specifications, and are also repeated in assignment briefs. The review team considers that these aligned with the SCQF levels and provide confidence in the secure award of credit.

1.38 Although not formally documented, there is evidence of the internal processes for the development of programmes and modules. This includes the minutes of the Arab Language working group (formulating the modules in this area) and evidence of some external contribution to the development of level 7 and 8 programmes in Islamic Banking. The minutes indicate a thorough consideration and testing of the appropriateness of the proposed learning outcomes and outline curricula, enriched by the contribution of the external representative.

1.39 The College works effectively with SQA to set and articulate academic standards through the design and development of its academic programmes. 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**

1.40 Academic standards are set by the SQA for its qualifications, through its external verifier reporting arrangements for verification of assessment outcomes. The College works with SQA to ensure the academic standards meet SQA's requirements.

1.41 The College has in place an assessment code of practice, a summative assessment policy and an internal verification policy, which set out in detail the College's procedures for the achievement of outcomes and its verification. Examiner meetings are held to confirm the grades determined following internal verification. The minutes of the examiner meetings are scrutinised by the SQA external verifier, whose report is due to be considered by AAC.

1.42 The College's arrangements would allow for the Expectation to be met.

1.43 The review team examined a range of documentary evidence, including programme specifications, the SQA external verifier report and assessment regulations. The team also discussed the College's arrangements with senior and academic staff, and with students.

1.44 Academic staff set assessments that are subject to rigorous internal verification according to the College's policy. The SQA external verifier reports on the scrutiny of assessment briefs and on the award of credit and qualifications. The review team scrutinised a variety of assignment briefs and these were found to be clear and aligned to the unit and programme learning outcomes. Students confirm that assessment briefs are clear and that they understand what is required of them in order to achieve.

1.45 The College's examiners report to the AAC, which considers students' performance and outcomes. Its membership does not formally include the SQA external verifier, although AAC's records are scrutinised as part of SQA's external verification visits. With the scheduled consideration of the external verifier report by the AAC, the review team considers the process to be robust and secure.

1.46 At the time of the review visit, the College had received its first SQA external verifier report, which was yet to be taken through the College's committee structure. The review team was told that the report would be presented to the College's AAC and then subsequently noted by the College Council, through the Principal's report. The external verifier report indicates confidence in the academic standards of the programmes at the College.

1.47 The College liaises with SQA to ensure the effective oversight of standards and that there are processes in place to assure the award of credit is secure. 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**

1.48 The SQA undertakes annual review of the College's programmes through its external verification process. This is conducted by its external verifier, who attests to the College's maintenance of academic standards. The SQA similarly has arrangements for periodic review of its programmes.

1.49 The College monitors the outcomes of its programmes through the AAC. This committee will also receive external verifier reports. At the time of the review visit, the College had recently received its first SQA external verifier report and it was yet to be considered through the College's committee structure. The report indicates that the College's programme documentation and assessment standards meet SQA requirements and therefore the College is maintaining academic standards.

1.50 The College's procedures, which are aligned to the requirements of the SQA, would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.51 The review team examined terms of reference and minutes of committee meetings within the College's deliberative structure, and examples of the College's monitoring and review documentation. The review team also held meetings with the Principal, senior staff, and academic and professional staff.

1.52 The College's terms of reference for its deliberative committee structure do not clearly outline the responsibility for standards, quality and enhancement, and this includes the receipt of programme annual reports; this leads to a recommendation being made under Expectation A2.1. The recent report of the SQA external verifier visit will be considered by the AAC. An update is then provided to the College Council by way of the Principal's report. The review team notes that an oral report of the SQA visit was presented to the AAC on 13 May 2016, as at that time the written report had yet to be received by the College.

1.53 The College's internal arrangements for annual monitoring are not clearly set out and the College does not have a formalised procedure for annual monitoring of programmes; this leads to a recommendation under Expectation B8 of this report. However, evidence indicates that unit coordinators are required to produce a unit report following delivery that incorporates feedback gathered from student questionnaires. The reports are then collated to produce a programme coordinators' report that is intended to serve as the programme annual monitoring report. At the time of the review visit, draft programme coordinator reports were made available for 2015-16 delivery, and these included a section for reporting on discussions with the external verifier. However, the report template does not provide opportunity for the analysis of student outcomes (be that progression or achievement), feedback from stakeholders and outcomes from Student Staff Consultative Committees (SSCCs). The review team notes that while this was the second year of operation in the delivery of SQA awards, no programme coordinator reports were produced for the 2014-15 academic year and as such the team could not test the effectiveness of the College's internal arrangements. In the absence of a formalised process or procedure, and the lack of clarity about the ownership of the College's internal annual monitoring process through its

deliberative committee structure, the College needs to strengthen its annual monitoring arrangements in order to assure the ongoing quality and enhancement of student learning opportunities. This leads to a recommendation being made under Expectation B8.

1.54 Oversight of academic standards by the College is maintained through adherence to the SQA's requirements. However, the College's internal arrangements for annual monitoring are underdeveloped, and clarity about the consideration of unit and programme reports is absent, which has resulted in a recommendation being made under Expectation A2.1 and two further recommendations being made under Expectation B8. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is moderate.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Moderate**

**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**

1.55 The responsibility for engaging external and independent expertise rests jointly between the SQA, through its arrangements for external verification and the setting of academic standards, and the College, through its engagement of external expertise in the maintenance of academic standards.

1.56 The College works with the SQA to ensure its procedures align to the requirements of SQA external verification. SQA external verifier reports are presented to the College's AAC and then noted by the College Council, through the Principal's report. The College holds examiner meetings that consider student performance and outcomes, and records of its meetings are scrutinised as part of the SQA's external verification visits.

1.57 A number of academic staff at the College hold positions at other higher education institutions. These members of staff bring external expertise into the process for the production of unit coordinators' reports, where any minor modifications are proposed for later consideration by the AAC.

1.58 The College's arrangements would allow for the Expectation to be met.

1.59 The review team considered evidence including the SQA external verifier report, documentation relating to course development, course handbooks and programme specifications. The review team also held meetings with senior, academic and professional staff to test the effectiveness of its operational arrangements.

1.60 The SQA procedures for programme approval and monitoring are rigorous and involve external subject expertise. The programme approval process involves validation visits by SQA representatives to the College. The result is an approval report from SQA that details the scrutiny under a number of categories and confirms approval at qualification and unit level. There is a guide for SQA Coordinators, which indicates that the submission to SQA is through a pro forma. The AAC is involved in the process through scrutiny of the approval documentation and the SQA report.

1.61 There is evidence of the use of external subject experts in the course development process. The College takes advantage of its external academic network to ensure that proposals that lead to modification are fit for purpose and maintain academic standards. A number of the College's academic staff are visiting appointments and bring considerable specialist expertise from their disciplines and home institutions.

1.62 There is evidence of the internal processes for the development of programmes and modules. These include the minutes of the Arab Language working group (formulating the modules in this area) and evidence of some external contribution to the development of level 7 and 8 programmes in Islamic Banking. The minutes of these meetings indicate a

through consideration and testing of the appropriateness of the proposed learning outcomes, enriched by the contribution of the external representative.

1.63 The College makes effective use of independent external expertise as part of course development, the maintenance of assessment standards and the secure award of credit. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

## The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding organisations: Summary of findings

1.64 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

1.65 All seven Expectations in this judgement area are met with low risk, with the exceptions of Expectations A2.1 and A3.2, which are considered to have moderate levels of risk. There is one recommendation made under Expectation A2.1 and no affirmations or features of good practice within this area. The review team has also makes four additional cross-referenced recommendations under Expectations A2.1, A3.3 and B8.

1.66 Where the review team finds moderate levels of risk, these relate to the College's deliberative structure and the need for it to be finalised, including the review of its associated terms of references, to provide clarity of responsibility for standards, quality and enhancement.

1.67 The College is approved to deliver customised awards through the SQA, its awarding organisation. Academic standards are therefore set by SQA, and the College is deemed to hold the processes and procedures in place that enable it to fulfil its requirements for the maintenance of standards on behalf of the SQA.

1.68 The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of the awarding organisation at the College **meets** 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 College is an approved centre for the SQA, and delivers customised awards that are certified and quality assured by the SQA. Its programmes are designed and approved in association with the SQA.

2.2 The programme approval process involves validation visits by SQA representatives to the College and encompasses the College's internal processes for setting the programme and unit aims and learning outcomes, credit value and subject content. The process is multi-stage, including a stage for scrutinising the available resource to support programmes. The result is an approval report from SQA, which details outcomes under various categories and confirms approval at qualification and unit level.

2.3 There is a guide for SQA Coordinators, which indicates that the submission to SQA is through a pro forma. The College SQA Coordinator is responsible for effective liaison with SQA representatives to ensure adherence to SQA processes and procedures. The AAC is involved in the process through scrutiny of the approval documentation prior to submission and the receipt of the SQA report.

2.4 The College's arrangements for designing units and programmes with oversight from the AAC would allow for the Expectation to be met.

2.5 The review team examined documentation, including minutes of the SQA approval visit, the centre approval application form and report, programme documentation, and records of programme development and minor modifications. The review team also held meetings with the Principal, senior and academic staff, and students.

2.6 The College works closely with the SQA to ensure that it has effective mechanisms for the design, development and approval of its delivered programmes. Staff and students are supported to acquire knowledge and understanding of SQA requirements for upholding academic standards. Programme specifications are readily available for students and staff in programme handbooks, through the VLE and summarised on the College website. Programme information includes appropriate details relating to standards, for example unit titles and codes, credit weightings and SCQF levels. Programme and unit learning outcomes are clearly set out in programme and unit specifications and are also repeated in assignment briefs.

2.7 The College does not have a formally documented and written process for the development of new programmes and modules that, by its absence, poses a risk to its adherence to SQA's requirements. It could also adversely affect the College's ability to give due consideration to its academic portfolio and promote staff understanding of the development and approval of new programmes. The review team **recommends** that, by December 2016, the College formalises and documents the internal procedure for the design, development and approval of new programmes.

2.8 There is evidence of programme development activity in response to student feedback. One example that the review team found to be a feature of good practice under Expectation B3 relates to the Arab Language working group created to formulate student learning materials to enhance their learning. The activity of the working group reported into the College's AAC, which approved its work and subsequent output. The review team was told that the material is shortly to be published, demonstrating its quality, and students also commented positively on its impact on their learning.

2.9 The College has also worked with external subject specialists to develop programme content on its level 7 and 8 programmes in Islamic Banking. The minutes indicate a thorough consideration and testing of the appropriateness of the proposed learning outcomes, enriched by the contribution of the external representative.

2.10 At the time of the visit the programmes had recently been introduced and so have not been subject to the need for any minor modifications resulting from the annual monitoring process. The College's procedure for the treatment of minor modifications to units or programmes is undocumented; this leads to a recommendation under Expectation B8.

2.11 The College's procedures for the development of its existing academic programmes in consultation with the SQA is effective. However, the lack of a written and documented process for the design and approval of new units indicates that the College gives insufficient emphasis or priority to assuring quality in its planning processes, and leads to a recommendation being made. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is moderate.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Moderate**

**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**

2.12 The Student Recruitment and Admissions Policy sets out the processes for the recruitment, selection and admission of students, and confirms the College's commitment to equality of opportunity. The College's Complaints and Appeals Procedure for Applicants outlines the process by which prospective applicants may make an appeal against an admission decision.

2.13 In conjunction with academic staff, the Student Administration Team is responsible for implementing the College's recruitment and admissions processes. Prospective applicants are able to submit applications online or in hard copy format. Students may be interviewed as part of the recruitment process before an offer is made by the College. Once an offer is accepted, students also receive a series of information packs, including welcome packs in English, Arabic and French and a new student information booklet.

2.14 The College's arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.15 The review team tested the Expectation by examining documentation, including the Student Recruitment and Admissions Policy, the Complaints and Appeals Procedure for Applicants, and samples of student admission records. The review team also held meetings with senior, academic and professional staff, and with students.

2.16 The Student Recruitment and Admissions Policy provides clear, helpful and specific information for applicants that includes entry requirements. It makes appropriate provision for students with disabilities or additional support needs and specifies the English language requirements for each programme.

2.17 The College's processes for application and admission are clear and accessible, and routinely followed. Contact with the College is made easy for applicants with access through hard copy or online forms, and frequent email communication from the admissions team. Students confirm that the process, including up to enrolment, is straightforward and that they have a good understanding of their programmes prior to commencement. However, the review team noted student uncertainty as to the purpose of the personal statement submitted as part of the application process, and there was no evidence provided to indicate its wider use or consideration by the College.

2.18 The admissions team discharges its responsibilities for recruitment and admissions effectively. The process is well managed and implemented consistently. Samples of students' files demonstrate that complete and detailed records are maintained and that students are recruited in line with College policy.

2.19 A range of staff development opportunities is available to admissions staff to ensure that those undertaking the admissions function are competent and trained to do so. Admissions staff work with academic colleagues to ensure applicants are suitably qualified, referring applicants for interviews as required. Its administrative staff also have in place a

comprehensive bank of standardised templates for use in correspondence with applicants to ensure consistency and transparency of the applicant experience, including where rejections are made. The College plans to create a new post of Student Recruitment and Marketing Officer so as to supplement the team's work.

2.20 There is a strong commitment within the College to recruit students with integrity. Careful scrutiny of student applications involves assessment of a range of evidence, including the assessment of individual applicants through interview when additional guidance from academic staff on subject-specific suitability is required. However, records of interviews are not retained. The review team considers this to be a shortcoming of the process, as it misses the opportunity for the College to capture potentially useful information to support student development, or provide insight into admission decisions should an appeal be made. The review team **recommends** that, by September 2016, the College maintain definitive records of student admission interviews to ensure transparency of the process.

2.21 Once an offer is accepted, the College maintains contact with its applicants through a series of information booklets. Students expressed satisfaction with their experience and considered that the pre-entry support they received by the College was efficient, factual and relevant.

2.22 The College's arrangements are clear and comprehensive in its coverage of aspects of student recruitment and selection. Although a recommendation is made to include the retention of interview records, 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**

2.23 The College mission is to 'pursue excellence in teaching, research and consultancy in the academic study of Islam and Muslims'. In pursuit of this aim, and to ensure that scholarship and professional practice inform its approaches to learning and teaching, the College employs a range of activities that includes peer observation, staff appraisal, and the work of the Centre for the Study of Islamic Diversity, Education and Ethics. Underpinning policies are the Recruitment and Selection Policy, the Staff Development Policy and the Peer Review Guidelines.

2.24 Academic staff are suitably qualified for delivery, with qualifications that are at least at, or one level above, the level of the taught qualification, and have extensive experience in their academic discipline. The SQA has oversight of staff suitability to deliver its programmes as part of its centre approval process.

2.25 The College's arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.26 In testing this Expectation the review team scrutinised documentary evidence, including a student submission to this review, the College Strategic Plan 2009-14, policy documents, records of peer reviews, staff appraisals and staff development, staff CVs and student feedback. The review team also met all staff involved in the provision of higher education provision, and students.

2.27 The College has a strong focus on the need to appoint well-qualified subject specialists to deliver its programmes. A significant majority of its academic staff has previous and extensive experience of working in universities both in the UK and abroad; many continue to do so while working in a part-time capacity for the College. Senior staff appropriately manage the recruitment process.

2.28 All academic staff are required to complete a certified teacher training course in order to continue delivery, thereby safeguarding teaching standards. Academic staff confirm that they are well-supported by the College in this endeavour through funding allocated by the Research Committee. As articulated through the College's Staff Development Policy the review team considers academic staff to have access to an appropriate and generous range of staff development activities. In addition to formal teacher training opportunities, staff are supported financially to attend conferences related to their disciplines and an internal programme of development is delivered by the College to cover topics in response to internal and sector needs, for example the Prevent Agenda, engagement with the Quality Code and the use of the VLE.

2.29 With the approval of the AAC, academic staff review their programmes in relation to teaching methodologies, resources, delivery patterns and student feedback. The review team found the College's response to student feedback in relation to the quality of Arabic student learning materials to be a good example of this. The College established a cross-programme working group involving students so as to proactively address student concerns and engage students in the process. As a consequence, the College has refreshed

its academic delivery, moving away from standard textbook-based language acquisition methods to interactive learning resources that place greater emphasis on interaction between speaking and listening, and include online and topical materials. Students confirm the high value they place on the learning materials in enhancing their learning. The revision of teaching methodologies and creation of high quality resources for the teaching of Arabic, which supports student learning opportunities, is **good practice**.

2.30 The annual staff appraisal scheme is designed to facilitate staff reflection on their performance and practice. Staff are encouraged to identify and develop potential for career advancement and promotion. Samples of appraisal records demonstrate that for academic staff there is a tendency to focus more on the development of research, publication and scholarly activity as distinct from pedagogy and the development of student learning. The review team found no evidence to indicate how the outcomes of themes arising from appraisals are used to inform the ongoing provision of staff development.

2.31 In response to a previous recommendation from the QAA, the AAC introduced a peer review process that provides academic staff with developmental feedback to support teaching practice. Academic staff comment positively on the experience and indicate that the scheme is achieving its aim of being non-threatening, supportive and inclusive. All teachers who deliver learning sessions, including the Principal, engage with the scheme. Use of the outcomes of peer reviews is currently underdeveloped; as yet, no analysis or linkage is made to the appraisal scheme or staff development programme.

2.32 Students appreciate the quality of the resources and facilities available to them, citing the excellent and plentiful IT facilities, a student common room, good quality teaching materials and the use of visiting lecturers. Students considered the College to be responsive to their feedback, with actions including a change in teacher, the extension of contact hours for a programme, the specialist development of a unit on research methodology in Social Sciences and Islamic Studies, and the development of learning resources for Arabic. A number of students have also benefitted from attendance at subject-related conferences. Students told the review team how they find the short semester delivery of programmes challenging and would welcome longer semesters. Students of Islamic Economics and Finance would also appreciate opportunities for work placements in relevant industries. A recent visit of the external verifier found learning and teaching at the College to be a strength.

2.33 Independence in student learning is developed through a range of traditional methods, including critical analysis of case studies, research assignments, additional reading, guided news articles, open lectures and external speakers. The College's programme of additional open lectures delivered by external experts, many of whom are highly regarded academics in their fields, is a valuable opportunity to enhance their learning. Students stated that they appreciate the value these opportunities add to their learning experience. The effective use of a wide-ranging academic network to raise the profile of research and stimulate student learning is **good practice**.

2.34 The College recognises the potential conflict that can exist between its aims to achieve excellence in research at the same time as excellence in learning and teaching where research has traditionally been a major focus for the organisation. There is recognition by senior managers of the need to develop a formal College learning and teaching strategy, and the review team considers that this will further support the work of the AAC in relation to enhancing learning opportunities. Given the relatively new initiatives by the College to develop its pedagogic practice, the review team **recommends** that, by December 2016, the College formalise and implement the strategic approach to learning and teaching.

2.35 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low, due to the College's recognition of the need for a defined strategy to develop and enhance learning and teaching, and current practices already being used.

**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**

2.36 A variety of support mechanisms and resources are available for students. Designated Student Welfare Officers provide pastoral and welfare support to students. The College has a formal agreement with the University of Dundee that enables students to access the University's counselling service. Information detailing the support arrangements at the College is available through a number of sources, including the College website, the Students' Handbook student induction materials and the College's VLE.

2.37 Students have access to the Student Bursary Scheme, Scholarship Fund and Hardship Fund as support mechanisms while undertaking their studies.

2.38 The College's arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.39 The review team considered evidence, including a student submission to this review, the Students' Handbook, minutes of SSCC meetings, and records relating to student bursaries and support funds. The team also spoke with College staff and students.

2.40 Together with members of the administrative team, who provide informal support and guidance, the Student Welfare Officers are the main source of referral to external professional services. The role of Student Welfare Officer is to provide information, advice and guidance for students' welfare and to deal with individual student concerns. It is undertaken by some academic staff in addition to their teaching responsibilities. Students confirm that they have access to a Student Welfare Officer, in addition to their lecturers and members of the administrative team, dependant on the type of assistance required; students said they would choose between these sources.

2.41 Students are complimentary about the type of help they have received in relation to health, personal finance and meeting academic deadlines. The level of support offered through the College's Student Bursary Schemes is extremely generous. For example, numerous students have benefitted from support for course fees, living allowances, and in a few cases travel. They are appreciative of the friendly and approachable atmosphere fostered within the College that enables mature and returning learners to have confidence to contact staff and continue with their studies. Discussions with teaching staff confirm that they also consider the Student Welfare Officer system and additional support arrangements to work well.

2.42 The College is not presently able to offer students career advice, but informed the team that discussions are underway with a local university for students to access its service. Students and College staff confirm awareness of the arrangements with the University of Dundee for the provision of a counselling service and commented on its benefits.

2.43 The minutes of the SSCC illustrate that issues concerning programmes of study, the learning environment and student welfare are considered. Students have the opportunity to raise issues and make requests through this committee, which are then considered through the AAC. The outcomes of student feedback are communicated to all students through email. Students confirm the effectiveness of this forum, citing the provision of Arabic keyboards to be one example of action taken arising from a discussion by the SSCC.

2.44 A number of other initiatives contribute positively to the development of students' academic and professional skills. These include the College's open lecture programmes, the use of guest lecturers, student access to attend specialist conferences, the recording and uploading of lectures to the VLE and social media, and the requirement for students to take a certificated course in the use of plagiarism-detection software.

2.45 Students receive formative and summative feedback on their work to indicate progress made. Formal monitoring of individual student progress is undertaken during examiners' meetings. Some aspects of monitoring are referred to in the programme coordinator's report. The College monitors student attendance daily, and headline student outcomes are reported annually to the College Council through the Principal's reports. However, the review team found little evidence of the College's routine and detailed consideration of student data that might inform its strategic approaches, and this leads to a recommendation being made under Expectation B8.

2.46 The College's arrangements for students' support and development are effective in developing student potential. 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**

2.47 The College does not have a student engagement strategy to outline how it engages students in the enhancement of their educational experience, although there are mechanisms for students to engage in feedback and quality assurance. These include the opportunity to provide regular feedback on programme delivery through module evaluations, and a student representative system that provides opportunity to participate in the College's deliberative committee structure.

2.48 In view of the current small cohort sizes, student representatives have volunteered for the role and no elections were necessary. If the plans to develop a student association materialise, the selection of student representatives will be revisited.

2.49 The SSCC is open to all students to attend and to provide feedback and raise concerns. Outcomes from the SSCC are considered by the AAC, which includes a student representative member. Similarly, a student representative also sits on the College Council.

2.50 The review team examined records of committee meetings for the AAC, the College Council and the SSCC. The review team also scrutinised documentation relating to the student feedback system and surveys, and discussed student engagement activities with College staff and students.

2.51 The SSCC is effective in dealing with issues raised by students, and this is confirmed by students. The minutes of meetings for the AAC and College Council show infrequent attendance by its student representative members, suggesting less use is made of these forums by students. There are no formalised procedures for the training of student representatives, and this may contribute to the difficulties in securing full representation and attendance at the College's deliberative committee meetings. The review team **recommends** that, by September 2016, the College provides training for student representatives in order to equip them more fully for their roles.

2.52 Students feed back on their academic experience through student unit evaluation forms and a student experience survey. Student feedback is used by unit coordinators to develop their annual unit reports. The review team heard that the College does not have a formalised mechanism for feeding back outcomes of its decisions arising from issues raised through feedback surveys, although both students and academic staff confirm that actions taken result in an email update; where changes relate to the College's accommodation, the actions are more visible.

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

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**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**

2.54 The College has a number of policies in place to ensure that it meets the requirements of SQA and maintains academic standards. The College has a summative assessment policy, internal verification policy, a verification code of practice and monitoring, and an assessment code of practice and monitoring protocols. The College's SQA Coordinator works with SQA to ensure its processes and procedures are robust. The SQA issues guidance on assessment standards, which is disseminated to academic staff through the SQA Coordinator.

2.55 Students have access to programme specifications and student handbooks that outline assessment requirements and programme and unit learning outcomes. Explanation of the requirements for submission of assessments, as well as the College's policies on plagiarism and collusion, are further detailed. Students have access to information on how to make an academic appeal in the Complaints and Appeals Policy.

2.56 The College holds examiner meetings to verify student outcomes prior to sign-off from the SQA.

2.57 The programme coordinators and teaching staff of each programme decide on recognition of relevant prior learning through the standardisation meeting and action points. Academic staff with expertise in each field are involved in assessing students' prior knowledge and recommending the applicant for either unconditional/conditional acceptance or rejection. They are communicated with by the Student Administrator, who is also involved in the application assessment process.

2.58 The review team tested the Expectation by reviewing documentary evidence, including assessment and verification policies and procedures, student handbooks samples of assignment briefs, external verifier reports, and minutes of examiner meetings. The review team also held meetings with College staff and students to determine its effective operation.

2.59 Academic staff hold authority to make decisions relating to claims for the recognition of prior learning, and the College has differing arrangements dependant on the subject and level of programme. Programme coordinators oversee the process and ensure parity and consistency. The College confirms that there have been no instances of student admission where the recognition of prior learning has had to be used.

2.60 Programme and unit assessment outcomes are designed in conjunction with the SQA; the College's internal verification arrangements and the SQA's external verification process ensure the secure award of credit. Assignments are set by academic staff, who use their expertise and experience of their substantive roles in universities to align assignment tasks to sector practice. Assignment briefs are subject to a rigorous internal verification procedure and are clear in the specification of tasks to be undertaken, but give little explanation of the distinctions between the grading bands. However, the review team heard from students who confirm that they understand the differences between the grade bands and what is needed in order to secure higher grades.

2.61 In the student submission to this review, reference is made to the need for greater consistency in the provision of structured feedback on assessments. However, at a meeting with the review team, students expressed satisfaction with the quality and detail of the assessment feedback, stating that assessment results are returned 'within days', although the College aims to return feedback on assessments within 12 working days of submission. Students confirmed that they are aware of the penalties for academic malpractice and plagiarism.

2.62 The College holds formal examiners' meetings to make recommendations on the grades achieved by students on individual modules or units, extenuating circumstances, progression, referral and deferral, and academic malpractice. Although its external verifiers are not required to be in attendance, records of its meetings are scrutinised during external verification visits.

2.63 The College adheres to the requirements of the SQA through the internal processes for the setting, marking and reporting of assessments. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

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

### **Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining**

#### **Findings**

2.64 The SQA is responsible for defining the role of, and appointing, external verifiers to its programmes. All approved programmes have an appointed external verifier, who will remain in post for three years. The external verifier is expected to visit the College once a year to scrutinise assessment and verification records, and attest to the maintenance of academic standards and the secure award of credit. The external verifier also scrutinises the minutes of the College examiners' meetings, where credit and grading recommendations are made. The annual visits ordinarily take place at the end of the programme year; arrangements are coordinated by the College's SQA Coordinator, who oversees the process. Students may form part of the visit schedule and, on its conclusion, the external verifier will produce a report that, having confirmed the maintenance of standards, will identify areas of best practice and actions that require improvement. Feedback from external verifier reports is presented to the College's AAC.

2.65 The College's arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.66 The review team scrutinised a number of documents, including the SQA external verifier's annual report and terms of reference of the College's deliberative committee structure, including the examiners' subcommittee. The review team also held meetings with senior and academic staff, and students.

2.67 The external verification process is rigorous and requires the confirmation of assessment briefs, assessment marking and the conduct of examiners' meetings. The annual external verification reporting process was not completed in the 2014-15 academic year but is now fully operational. Consequently, there was no evidence to demonstrate how the College would make scrupulous use of examiner feedback. At the time of the review visit, the College had received its first annual visit report that had yet to be considered by its committees. The review team notes that a verbal report of the visit was given to the AAC, and was informed that the report would be presented to the AAC and subsequently noted by the College Council, through the Principal's report. The review team **recommends** that, by December 2016, the College ensures that scrupulous use of external verifier reports is made through the College's committee structure.

2.68 As noted under Expectation A2.1, the College is currently undergoing a review of its governance structure and the terms of reference of the committees. Although the terms of reference for the AAC do not clearly set out responsibility for assessment decisions, inspection of the minutes show that it has responsibility for consideration of the external verifier reports. However, it is not clear from the minutes how assessment results are fed into the annual monitoring process, and this leads to a recommendation being made under Expectation B8.

2.69 Effective use of external verifiers is undertaken by the College. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met. However, in light of the fact that the presentation of the 2015-16 external verifier report to the College's committees could not be fully demonstrated, and indicates a weakness in the operation of the College's governance structure, the associated level of risk is moderate.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Moderate**

**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**

2.70 The College's self-evaluation document outlines the processes for annual monitoring and review. Unit coordinators produce a unit report that feeds into programme coordinator reports. Programme reports, incorporating information from the unit coordinators' reports, are scheduled to be received by the AAC. Evidence was not provided during the review to show that these had been completed or submitted to the committee to date.

2.71 The College's current arrangements do not allow for the effective, regular and systematic review of programmes, and would therefore not allow the Expectation to be met.

2.72 To test the Expectation, the review team evaluated the College's arrangements for annual monitoring, including unit coordinators' reports, draft programme coordinators' reports, the SQA external verifier report, and the terms of references and minutes of meetings for the College's deliberative committee structure. The review team also met College staff and students to discuss these arrangements and stakeholder involvement.

2.73 The review team found a lack of clarity about the College's oversight arrangements for the consideration and approval of programme reports. Review of its terms of references do not clearly indicate which deliberative committee holds responsibility for annual monitoring, and this leads to a recommendation being made under Expectation A2.1.

2.74 Despite this being the College's second year of operation, annual programme coordinator reports were not completed in the 2014-15 academic year, making this the first year of completion. As a result, there is no evidence to demonstrate the steps taken to respond to the outcomes of the report analyses. The annual monitoring process is not formalised within the College, although senior and academic staff outlined its initial stages. The review team was told that the programme coordinators' reports would be considered by the ACC and would be presented to the College Council, through the Principal's report. However, the terms of reference for the AAC do not explicitly relate to annual monitoring, and its minutes of meetings do not clearly demonstrate the systematic monitoring of unit or programme reports. Similarly, the review team found that the Principal's report submitted to the College Council does not explicitly refer to programme coordinator reports or to the analysis of outcomes arising. The Principal's report does include some commentary on cohort performance and student feedback. The review team **recommends** that, by December 2016, the College formalises and documents the process for annual monitoring.

2.75 The draft programme coordinators' reports are largely discursive. Although there is evidence of input from unit coordinators' reports, the review team found no reference to feedback from external verifiers, nor to the evaluation of student outcomes, progression and withdrawal rates. The report template lacks opportunity for the inclusion of proposals for minor or major modifications arising from analysis and there are no sections to enable the outlining recommended actions. Similarly, unit coordinator reports do not contain any detail of student performance or external verifier feedback, although student module feedback is included. The review team **recommends** that, by December 2016, the College strengthens the programme annual monitoring process by systematically identifying and analysing relevant information to assure and enhance the quality of student learning opportunities.

2.76 The College does not have a documented procedure for the periodic review of its programmes. Senior and academic staff indicated that, as all the programmes currently operating are relatively new, there has not been the need to develop a process. However, there is a requirement for periodic review by the SQA, and the review team is of the view that the internal and external processes should be developed, regardless of its point of operation. The review team **recommends** that, by December 2016, the College devises and implements arrangements for periodic review.

2.77 The College has not clearly documented the procedures for programme annual monitoring or for the periodic review of programmes that would allow for it to regularly and effectiveness review its programmes. This indicates a weakness in the operation of the College's governance structure as it relates to quality assurance. However, the review team acknowledges that the evaluation of units and programmes does take place, albeit inconsistently. The review team concludes that the Expectation is not met and the associate level of risk is moderate.

**Expectation: Not met**

**Level of risk: Moderate**

**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**

2.78 The complaints and appeals procedure is multi-stage. In the first instance, a student will attempt to resolve the issue informally with the programme coordinator. The second stage involves the student submitting the complaint or appeal in writing to the Student Administrator; the submission is then considered at a meeting with the student and a senior member of the College. If the issue is still not resolved the final stage involves the student writing to the Principal's Office requesting that it be referred to the Academic Council. The Council will normally establish a subgroup of members, who will meet with the student to hear the appeal. At such a meeting the student may be accompanied by a friend or other adviser. Information about how to locate the complaints and appeals procedures is included in the student handbooks.

2.79 The College's arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.80 In testing the Expectation the review team examined the Complaints and Appeals Policy, student handbooks and minutes of meetings for the College's deliberative committee structure. This included the meetings considering the consideration and of the policies. The review team also met academic and professional staff and students.

2.81 The policies are clearly set out and comprehensive and the appeals policy defines clearly the scope of student appeals. Following a QAA workshop in May 2015, a number of improvements were made to the complaints and appeals policies and procedures; the revised policies were approved by the AAC. The procedures for handling complaints and appeals are multi-staged, involving an informal and formal stage.

2.82 Both College staff and students indicated an awareness of the respective policies and where to locate them. The review team notes that, to date, no complaints or appeals have been made.

2.83 The College has in place effective policies and procedures to handle student complaints and appeals. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**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**

2.84 The College does not provide learning opportunities with other providers, therefore this Expectation does not apply.

**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**

2.86 The College does not offer research degrees, therefore this Expectation does not apply.

## The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.87 In reaching its judgements about the quality of learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

2.88 Eight of the nine applicable Expectations in this judgement area are met; Expectation B8 is not. Expectations B1, B7 and B8 are deemed to have moderate levels of risk due to weaknesses in the operation of part of the College's governance structures. These Expectations relate to formalising the annual monitoring process to include consideration of student outcomes data with appropriate deliberative committee oversight, and developing a periodic review process. The associated level of risk for the remaining Expectations is low.

2.89 The review team makes eight recommendations and identifies two features of good practice (both in relation to Expectation B3) in this judgement area. There are no affirmations. Of the recommendations made, these relate to the College's internal procedures for the design, development and approval of new programmes (Expectation B1); the maintenance of student admission interview records (Expectation B2); the implementation of a strategic approach to its learning and teaching (Expectation B3); the provision of training for student representatives to support them in their roles (Expectation B5); making scrupulous use of external verifier reports through the College's committee structure (Expectation B7); and three recommendations in Expectation B8 that relate to formalising the annual monitoring process to include consideration of student outcomes data with appropriate deliberative committee oversight, and developing a periodic review process. The good practice identified in Expectation B3 pertains to the College's use of its wide-ranging academic networks to stimulate student learning and the revisions made to teaching methodologies, and the creation of high quality Arabic resources to support student learning opportunities.

2.90 All but one Expectation in this judgement area is met and the associated level of risk in this instance is deemed to be a moderate. In addition, the review team found moderate level of risks relating to Expectations B1 and B7. While there is no evidence that current quality has been compromised, sufficient weaknesses were identified in programme monitoring, and the College's oversight of it, such as to require focused and timely action to safeguard future academic quality. The moderate risk identified at B1, B7 and B8 indicate weaknesses in the operation of the College's governance structure as it relates to quality, and that, in some cases, insufficient emphasis or priority is given to assuring quality. The College's priorities or recent actions suggest that it may not be fully aware of the significance of these issues. However, previous response to external review activities suggest that it will take the required actions and provide evidence of action, as requested.

2.91 The review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the College **requires improvement to meet** 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 College provides information for a number of key stakeholders, including prospective and current students, staff and the public. Information accessible through the website includes details about the College's mission and vision, admissions, facilities, its research centre, key policies and programme outlines. The website also features a recently introduced facility for completing online programme applications. The College maintains sites on a number of social media platforms, used mainly as an advertising tool. Its teaching sessions are routinely shared online and on the VLE.

3.2 Information available to students through the VLE includes, as a minimum, programme of study learning outcomes, criteria for assessment, weekly session outlines and reading lists.

3.3 A range of handbooks and welcome packs available to applicants and students prior to enrolment, during induction, and while on programme provides essential information. The College provides hard copy course leaflets, produced for local advertising.

3.4 The Record Retention Policy lists the different types of document, their period of retention and its rationale; coverage includes student applications and administration, teaching, assessment and research.

3.5 Ultimate responsibility for managing and assuring the quality of information that the College publishes rests with the Principal. Some of this responsibility is delegated appropriately to members of the AAC. The College's librarian and its media consultant undertake responsibility for the editing and upkeep of documents.

3.6 The administration office manager and the College's media consultant are responsible for managing and assuring the quality of information uploaded to the College's social media sites. Similarly, the College's Student Administrator supports academic staff with the upload of materials to the VLE. Members of the College Council hold authority for the final approval of College policies prior to publication on the website.

3.7 The College's arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

3.8 In assessing the quality of College information and the effectiveness of its arrangements, the team reviewed the College website, the VLE, its social media sites, student handbooks and policy documents. The review team also met senior managers, academic and professional staff, and students.

3.9 The College website and VLE are easy to navigate. Staff are clear about responsibilities for managing these platforms and for the approval of documents through appropriate committees. Academic staff are well supported by professional colleagues in uploading and editing information.

3.10 Students confirmed that the promotional material they received about the College was accurate prior to arriving at the College and during their induction; this helped students feel well informed about the College and about living in Dundee. The review team found the handbooks students receive to be attractive, detailed, accessible and welcoming. Handbooks contain photographs; information on health, finance, travel and immigration; College administration; and programme specifications. Welcome packs sent to students in advance of arrival are available in three different languages.

3.11 The posting of College teaching sessions online is an effective way of supporting teaching and learning, and of enabling access to specialised subject content for a wider audience. Large numbers of viewing hits confirm the success of this initiative. The College maintains the privacy of attending students by editing its videos; a designated member of staff holds responsibility for the management of both platforms. The College's other forms of social media are less well promoted and used. The College is taking well-considered steps to develop a formal strategy for social media in consultation with external experts.

3.12 It is evident that staff are aware of who is responsible for approving and checking different types of information. Cyclical documents such as policies and student handbooks are appropriately managed with respect to updating. Although students and staff have confidence in College information, the review team was unable to confirm the College's arrangement for the regular monitoring of its published information. College staff confirm that ad-hoc checks are undertaken on its social media sites and the College website by a designated member of staff, although not routinely. In light of this and the planned development to expand its use of social media, the review team **recommends** that, by September 2016, the College formalises arrangements for the routine monitoring of information to ensure it remains fit for purpose and trustworthy.

3.13 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 the information about learning opportunities: Summary of findings

3.14 In reaching its judgements on the quality of the information about learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

3.15 There is one Expectation in this judgement area that is met a low level of risk. The review team makes one recommendation, and identifies no affirmations or features of good practice. The recommendation pertains to the College's routine arrangements to ensure information it publishes remains accurate and fit for purpose.

3.16 The College provides a range of information for its stakeholders relating to its mission and vision, admissions, facilities, its research activity and programme outlines. Students have access to the College website and VLE as the primary sources of information, and the review team found both platforms to be easy to use and navigate. The College also uses social media to support its marketing activity.

3.17 A range of handbooks and welcome packs are available, both prior to enrolment and on programme, so as to support and inform the student learning experience. Responsibility for managing and assuring the quality of information rests with the Principal, who delegates, where appropriate, to members of the College's AAC.

3.18 The review team concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at the College **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 College does not at present have an active strategic plan, the previous one having concluded in 2014, and as a result there is not a defined strategic approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities. Its current arrangements do not describe any process for systematically identifying enhancement opportunities, although the College has outlined instances whereby staff or students have identified issues, and it has taken steps to make improvements. Such activity has related to student representation and College facilities.

4.2 The College's current arrangements would not allow for the Expectation to be met.

4.3 The review team evaluated the effectiveness of the College's approach by examining terms of reference and minutes of meetings for its deliberative committees, unit coordinators' reports, draft programme coordinators' reports, and student feedback. The review team also held meetings with the Principal, senior staff, academic and professional staff, and students.

4.4 It is not clear where in the governance structure the responsibility for enhancement lies. The College's self-evaluation document submitted for the review offers no examples of specific committee consideration or of any implementation, follow-up and review of improvements that have been introduced. The review team queried the College's approach to enhancement with staff. The responses varied, and provided no indication of any agreed organisation-wide understanding of an articulated approach. Enhancement was viewed in most cases as examples of instances where the College had reacted to issues identified through student feedback. These examples illustrate that the College is willing to undertake improvements, where possible, when they are brought to its attention, although it lacks evidence of a deliberate, systematic approach. The review team finds that there is no common understanding of the enhancement process embedded within the College.

4.5 Students and staff identified a number of examples whereby improvements to the student learning opportunities have been made as a result of student feedback. Minutes of the SSCC clearly demonstrate openness between students and the College in raising issues, and a willingness on the part of the College to address these and report on action taken.

4.6 The review team asked about the College's deliberative committee structure and where there would be evidence of deliberate steps being taken at College level to improve the quality of student learning opportunities. Senior staff made reference to the AAC and the College Council, however, inspection of minutes of meetings indicates that there is no systematic consideration of enhancement at a strategic level. Terms of reference do not clearly identify where the responsibility for standards, quality and enhancement lie within its committee structure, and this leads to a recommendation under Expectation A2.1.

4.7 Similar scrutiny of the minutes of the College Council revealed no evidence of a strategic or integrated approach to the development, implementation and monitoring of enhancement activities. The College's processes, in particular annual monitoring, are not fully effective in identifying and sharing good practice, and consequently providing

opportunities for enhancement of student learning; this leads to a recommendation under Expectation B8.

4.8 There is no evidence that the AAC makes use of existing processes for the identification and dissemination of good practice. Some innovations in teaching, learning and assessment cited in meetings with senior and academic staff are isolated examples of good practice that the review team considers to be missed opportunities for wider dissemination; similarly, thematic analyses from staff appraisal, peer observation and student interviews are further potential opportunities for the development of enhancement initiatives.

4.9 Although the review team does not consider it necessary for the College to have a single documented enhancement strategy, it considers that the lack of an articulated approach limits opportunities for enhancement. The review team **recommends** that, by December 2016, the College develops and disseminates a strategic approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities that is embedded at all levels.

4.10 Taking all these matters into consideration, the review team concludes that the Expectation is not met. While there is evidence of the College giving serious consideration to the suggested improvements by students and staff, its deliberative arrangements do not allow for the systematic and planned enhancement activity. This indicates a weakness in the College's governance as it relates to quality assurance, and a lack of clarity about responsibilities for enhancement. Therefore, the associated level of risk is moderate.

**Expectation: Not met**

**Level of risk: Moderate**

## The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.11 In reaching its judgements on the enhancement of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

4.12 The one Expectation in this judgement area is not met, with a moderate level of risk. The review team identifies no features of good practice or affirmations, and makes one recommendation. The recommendation calls upon the College to develop and disseminate a strategic approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities that is embedded at all levels. Additionally, there are two cross-references to Expectations A2.1 and B8 for the clarification of enhancement responsibility through the College's deliberative committee structure, and the strengthening of the annual monitoring process to allow for the systematic enhancement of student learning opportunities.

4.13 The Expectation is assigned a moderate level of risk owing to the College's evidence of responding to student feedback, albeit at programme level, to make individual improvements. Its underdeveloped governance arrangements, however, do not enable the College to systematically plan the enhancement of student learning opportunities. This indicates a weakness in the College's governance as it relates to quality assurance, and a lack of clarity about responsibilities for enhancement. The College's priorities or recent actions suggest that it may not be fully aware of the significance of this issue. However, previous response to external review activities suggest that it will take the required actions and provide evidence of action, as requested.

4.14 The review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the College **requires improvement to meet** UK expectations.

## 5 Commentary on the Theme: Digital Literacy

### Findings

5.1 Approaches to digital literacy at the College are in the early stages of development. As yet, the College does not have an articulated strategic approach towards extending students' digital literacy skills, but is open to developing and using integrated learning technologies in response to future initiatives as and when these are suggested.

5.2 The College places significant emphasis on the use of its virtual learning environment as its primary mechanism for developing digital literacy, although its predominant use is as a repository for learning materials and programme information. Students provided examples of information accessed that include course details, weekly session outlines, assessment details, and teaching resources. The College is gaining some success in further developing students' digital skills by promoting the use of the interactive discussion forums on the VLE that contribute to summative assessment. Students of Arabic access learning resources that extend their language acquisition skills and are encouraged to access current news items through web links.

5.3 Students and staff are well supported by administrative and library staff in their use of the VLE, including initial log-in procedures and ongoing ad hoc individualised training as required. Similarly, the College is conscientious in resourcing the ongoing training for its professional staff. Student confidence in using aspects of the VLE is developed at the beginning of programme delivery, which includes the completion of a developmental and certificated short course in the use of plagiarism-detection software. Following this, students are required to submit written assessments through the software, although they also have access to use it developmentally.

5.4 Academic staff confirm that students are provided with access to specialist software packages and databases that support technical subject knowledge, although the review team perceived some inconsistency in its use to support learning, and students did not appear to be aware of its availability.

5.5 The College library provides further support in the use of technology-supported learning through access to online publications and journals to assist students with academic research and study.

5.6 One of the College aims is to develop distance-learning programmes. In preparation for this, the College is filming its academic sessions and making available audio recordings that are posted to the VLE and social media to aid student learning. This approach has been commended by the College's awarding organisation.

## 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 22-25 of the [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\) 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](http://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](http://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.

### Awarding organisation

An organisation authorised to award a particular qualification; an organisation recognised by Ofqual to award Ofqual-regulated qualifications

### 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.

### **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.

### **Self-evaluation document**

A report submitted by a higher education provider, assessing its own performance, to be used as evidence in a QAA review.

### **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.

## **QAA1746 - R4942 - Sept 16**

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Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB  
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel: 01452 557050  
Web: [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)